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Galápagos Islands, Ecuador – Photo by Steve McCurry

Budapest's recently renovated Neo-Renaissance Hungarian State Opera House

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PHOTOGRAPH: JEROME GALLAND

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WORD OF MOUTH

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Kayakers in British Columbia's Foch-Gilttoyees Provincial Park, an ideal place for a slow-travel experience

PHOTOGRAPH: ANDREW STRAIN

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editor's letter

AFTER A FEW UNHAPPY YEARS of border closures and restrictions, travelers could have been forgiven for trying to make up for lost time by checking off as many bucket-list destinations as they could, as quickly as they could. The rather ugly term *revenge travel* did enter the lexicon, but many trip takers refused to take the bait, choosing to go deeper rather than just skim the surface; to get to know more of a single country instead of ticking off five in one go; to treat travel as a search for understanding, not as a trophy hunt.

What brought about this remarkable shift? It's due in part to the changing nature of work, which has allowed people—especially people of means—to structure their lives differently. But in my view an even bigger factor is a broad rethinking currently under way about the very purpose of travel. As Catherine Heald, the cofounder and CEO of the Asia-focused luxury-travel agency Remote Lands, puts it, "The pandemic produced more slow travelers because people had time to reflect on what is really important to them in life—including mindfulness and meditation and meaningful travel."

Her recent clients have included an emergency-room doctor in Cleveland who took a two-month sabbatical to immerse herself in Balinese culture, spirituality, and wellness, and a San Francisco couple who embarked on a four-week deep dive into Vietnam more than four decades after the husband spent his early adulthood protesting the war there. In our lovely package "How to Slow Down Now" (page 35), we offer eight travel experiences in this vein, plus two dozen additional trip ideas from trusted specialists like Catherine. (For the complete list of *Condé Nast Traveler*'s 2023 Top Travel Specialists, visit *cntraveler.com/travel-specialists*.) I encourage you to reach out to one of them today to help shape your next slow-travel adventure. Because, in the wise words of Trevor Noah: "If there's one thing you'll never waste your money on, it's traveling."

JESSE ASHLOCK
DEPUTY GLOBAL EDITORIAL DIRECTOR
AND HEAD OF EDITORIAL CONTENT, U.S.

jesseashlock

on the cover

A richly appointed suite at Stok Palace Heritage Hotel in Ladakh, India.
Photographed by Tom Parker

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Cruising past Rome's Palazzo della Consulta in a vintage Fiat 500.
Photographed by Ryan Neeven (@neevenr)

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WORD OF MOUTH

the people, places & ideas we're talking about right now

THE MAGIC OF MÉRIDA

Creativity leads the way in the pretty, colonial capital of Mexico's Yucatán state, where a spate of galleries and design-forward hotels and restaurants has recently opened

PHOTOGRAPH: CIGNO HOTEL

The pool and patio area at Hotel Cigno, a reimagined 19th-century mansion in Mérida

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Artist Leo Mock and his dog Monty in the studio space at China Art Objects

Traditional plaster techniques and 19th-century tiles on display at Hotel Cigno

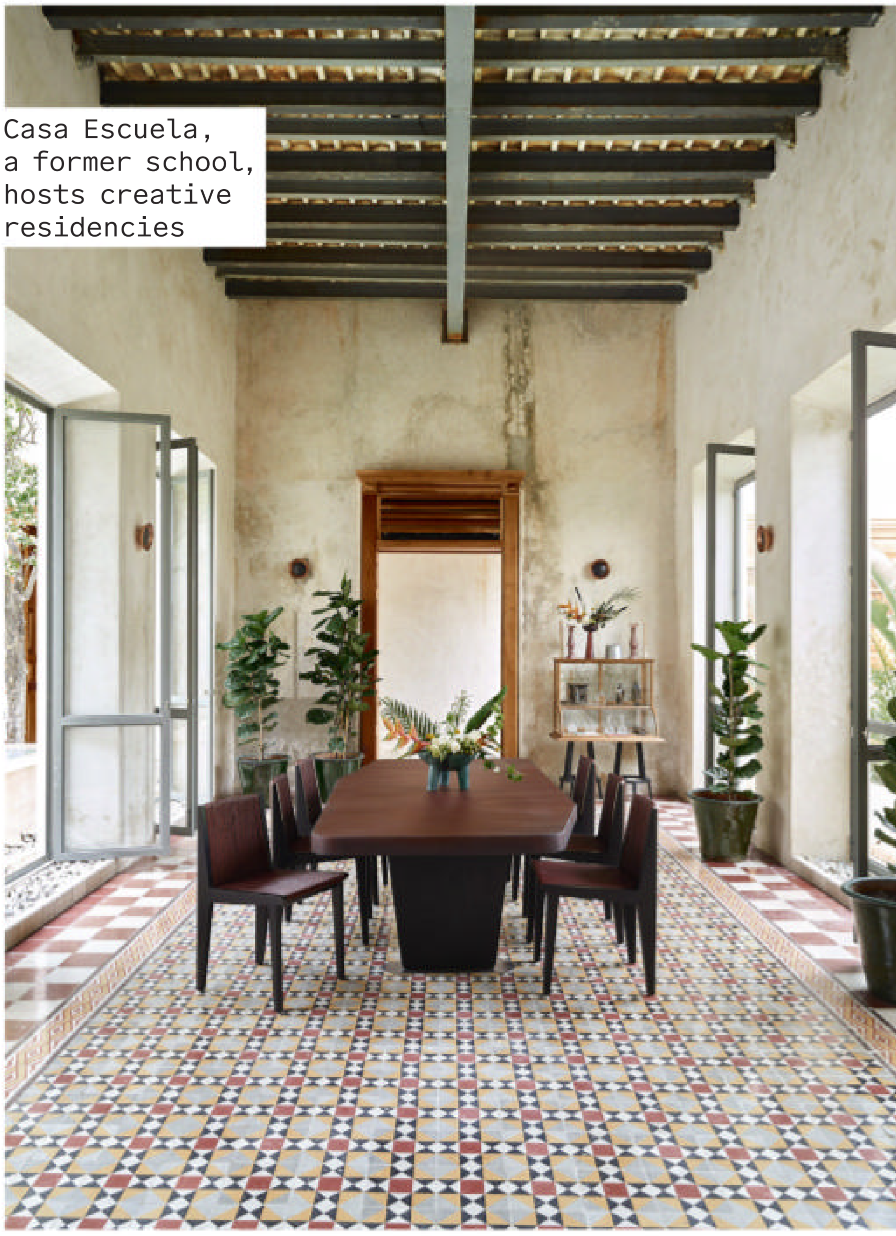
For years, Mérida was seen less as a destination in its own right and more as a way station en route to Mayan temples nearby. But during the aughts, influential creatives began to discover the abundant, ornate, affordable 19th-century haciendas along its wide boulevards and put down roots: The Cuban American artist Jorge Pardo bought and restored a dilapidated mansion; in 2010, the Italian designer Francesca Bonato and the Argentina-born model Nicolas Malleville opened an outpost of their chic Tulum-based perfumery and micro-hotel Coqui Coqui in the center of town. Now Mérida is experiencing a second wave as more and more artists, entrepreneurs, and aesthetes choose to call it home.

"There's a new energy," says José García Torres, a curator widely known throughout Mexico. "A lot of interesting people are coming to town." Seeking a slower pace of life, García Torres opted in 2017 to close his prestigious Mexico City gallery and relocate to Mérida, where he opened Salón Gallos, a showcase for emerging international and Mexican artists, like Lorena Ancona. Also featuring a bar and restau-

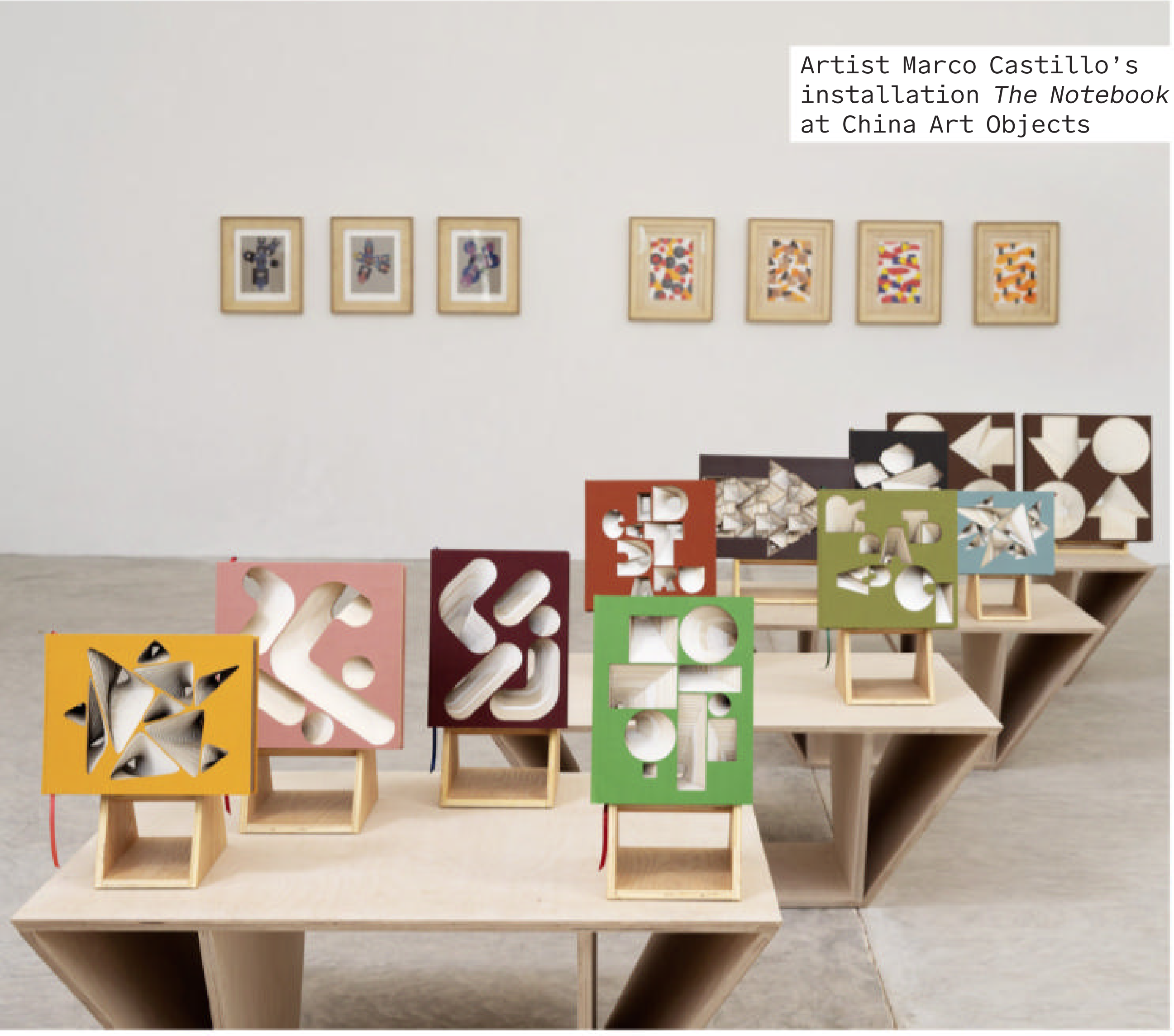
PHOTOGRAPHS: TUESDAY YATES, ALEXA TORRE, FERNANDO MARROQUÍN

rant, it is one of the city's few multiuse spaces. "It's a place where people can meet up and collaborate," he explains. Recently, he and his partners opened two more spots that he hopes will also become gathering hubs: Pizza Neo, which serves pies in a glass-fronted space with geometric motifs that nod to Mayan architecture, and El Gato cocktail bar, named for a book by the Mérida-born novelist Juan García Ponce. In García Torres's view, these restaurants can contribute to the larger conversation around the arts in Mérida. "We want to use these spaces to bring attention to and build on the legacy of culture here," he says.

Similarly, the gallerist couple Tuesday Yates and Steve Hanson relocated here from Los Angeles four years ago. "The city felt really vibrant and like we could be a part of the growth," Yates says. The pair brought along their successful contemporary gallery China Art Objects, which spotlights the work of international artists as well as fellow Mérida transplants like Pardo and sculptor Marco Castillo.



Casa Escuela, a former school, hosts creative residencies



Artist Marco Castillo's installation *The Notebook* at China Art Objects

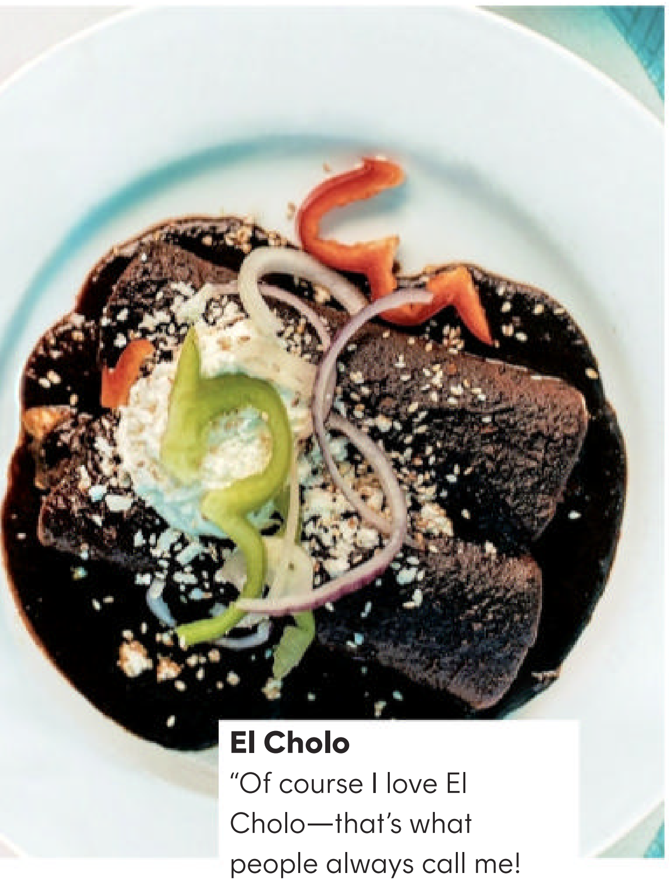
More recently, designer Monica Calderon and architect Ezequiel Farca opened Casa Escuela, a residency for artists and makers. Located in a former school that the pair overhauled, it has concrete screen-walls and bright woven rugs. It comprises two exhibition spaces, artist studios, and a separate house with five bedrooms.

For travelers seeking their own mansions for short stays, additional hotels have cropped up. Hotel Cigno, a terra-cotta-toned boutique property, opened last May in a 19th-century estate in central Mérida, while just outside the city center, artist Claudia Fernández unveiled the seven-room Casa Puuc, an Art Deco–style house originally constructed in 1914, which she renovated with her father. The airy rooms have limestone walls, restored wooden doors, and printed tiles. "I tried to construct the architectural project as I would a piece of art," says Fernández. In Mérida, craft is always at the core. MARY HOLLAND

CITY OF TACOS

From East LA to the Valley, these are actor and restaurateur Danny Trejo's go-to spots

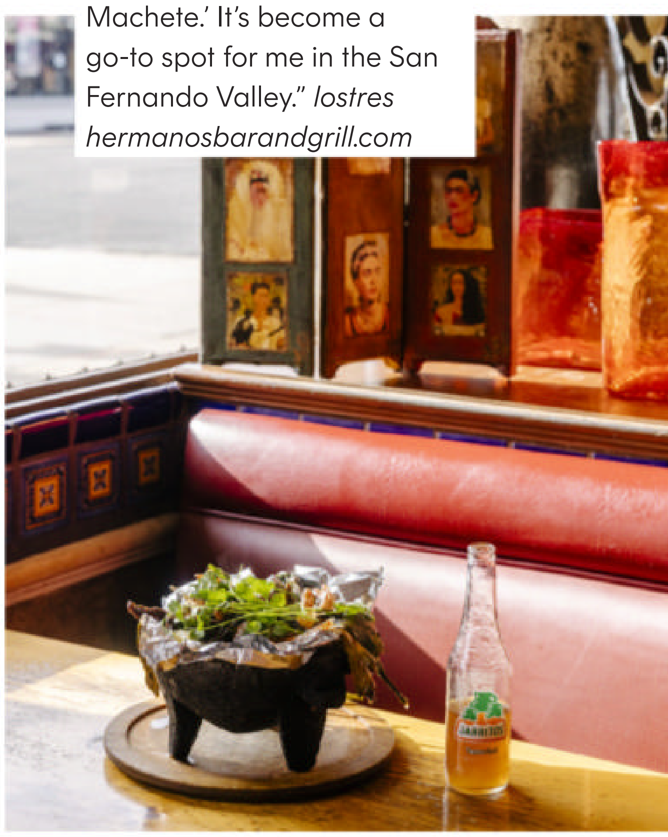
You know Danny Trejo from tough-guy roles like Machete in the *Spy Kids* franchise, but off-screen you're most likely to catch the LA-born Mexican American actor bent over a plate of tacos at an old-school restaurant, his infectious laugh crackling through the air. "I'm always eating good food," Trejo says. His mother's and grandmother's cooking may have had something to do with it: "If you brought a store-bought tortilla into my grandma's house, she would not talk to you." In recent years, he has built on his fame, family heritage, and infallible taste buds with a string of seven restaurants—including Trejo's Tacos and Trejo's Coffee & Donuts—and a foray into cookbooks, the second of which, *Trejo's Cantina: Cocktail, Snacks & Amazing Non-Alcoholic Drinks from the Heart of Hollywood* ($28, Clarkson Potter), will be released on April 18. So we had to find out: Which LA Mexican restaurants meet Trejo's exacting standards? AS TOLD TO MEGAN SPURRELL



El Cholo
"Of course I love El Cholo—that's what people always call me! You find locations all over the city. Their enchiladas are not as good as mine! But they're really, really good with two eggs over easy on top. You can kill breakfast and lunch at the same time." *elcholo.com*

TREJO'S TACOS
O'S T

Los Tres Hermanos
"I always order the pork chile verde—it's unbelievable—and their hard-shell beef tacos. I've never seen anybody complain about anything they've had there. They even have a chair that says 'Reserved for Danny Trejo, Machete.' It's become a go-to spot for me in the San Fernando Valley." *lostreshermanosbarandgrill.com*



Magaly's Tamales & Mexican Grill
"I live in the Valley now, and these are probably the best tamales I've ever had besides my grandma's. On Christmas and New Year's, there are lines around the block, but I eat them all year-round. I get two beef tamales, then I'll get six or seven to bring home." *magalystogo.com*

El Tepeyac Cafe
"In East Los Angeles, you can drive anywhere and get homemade tortillas. At El Tepeyac, they are next-level, paired with real Mexican food. I don't drink, but every time I go in, the owner is always like, 'Hey, el cholo!' and gives me a little shot of whiskey or tequila. Once he walks away, I give it to somebody, so everybody likes to sit next to me." *eltepeyac.cafe*

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PHOTOGRAPHS: EL CHOLO, GLORIA TORES, JESSICA SAMPLE

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Colorful patterned poufs at Khan el-Khalili souk

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EVERYTHING OLD IS NEW AGAIN

Cairo is a haven for traditional crafts, but a new generation of makers is adding a modern twist

QUIRKY KEEPSAKES

Cairo-born entrepreneur Ahmed Hefnawy has a keen eye for the more offbeat details of his hometown. At Cairopolitan, his concept store and art gallery in the Garden City district, he translates those observations into tongue-in-cheek souvenirs: canvas pencil cases masquerading as baladi flatbreads or copper-plated 10-qirsh coins (Egyptian pennies) blown up to the size of cocktail coasters. Peek into the gallery space next door for rotating exhibitions by homegrown designers and artists. *cairopolitan.com*

CLEVER CREATIVES

Also in Garden City: the showroom of Byhand African Artisans, where husband-and-wife designer duo Henrik Georg and Ellen Simonia have married their minimalist Scandinavian sensibilities with a passion for Egyptian and Kenyan craftsmanship. Standouts include candleholders of rough-polished alabaster and salt stone and a multicolored collection of throws with embroidery by Berber women from the Siwa Oasis, in Egypt's northwest. *byhandafricanartisans.com*

JEWELRY AND BEYOND

The pint-size Alkemia Boutique in the leafy Maadi suburb offers a platform for both established and emerging local talent. Shoppers can find modular necklaces made of silver and pearls by jewelry designer (and lawyer) Farida El-Bakry and pottery-inspired gold-plated brass pendants by metalsmith Farah Abdelhamid. Every Thursday a farmers market takes over the CSA community hub near the boutique—pick up honey, spices, and freshly baked goods. *alkemiaboutique.com*

PHOTOGRAPHS: CHRIS SCHALKX

Handcrafted wares at Byhand African Artisans

Beaded bracelets at Nevin Altmann

Kiliim sells rugs produced by Egyptian artisans

Bolt totes at Cairopolitan
EDITION II
CAIRO PRINTS

The Mohammed Maraashly location of home-furnishings shop Caravanserai
caravanserai

HERITAGE HOMEWARES

Embedded in the Zamalek district, Caravanserai's pair of showrooms draw on the rich history of the Silk Road, with made-in-Egypt furniture, artworks, and light installations. Styled like a traditional home, its flagship on Ahmed Heshmat is a treasure trove of design inspiration, while the gift shop on Mohammed Maraashly stocks suitcase-friendly items such as brass lampshades, wooden serving plates, and delicately glazed ceramic mugs. *caravanserai-design.com*

EMBROIDERED EVERYTHING

On a visit to the Siwa Oasis more than 30 years ago, German-Egyptian designer Nevin Altmann discovered the needlecraft of the local women. Seeking to preserve this nearly lost ancient skill, she now works with more than 300 artisans designing colorful tasseled shawls, leather rucksacks, and breezy caftan abayas. In 2011, Altmann's daughter set up the eponymous brand, which has four boutiques in districts such as Zamalek and Maadi. *nevinaltmann.com*

SKIN CARE THAT ISN'T SKIN-DEEP

Cairenes swear by the shampoos, body scrubs, and olive-oil soap bars from Nefertari Body Care, whose handmade and all-natural products utilize traditional Egyptian ingredients like almond oil, beeswax, and frankincense. The brand—which works with NGOs and aid organizations to provide employment opportunities to disadvantaged Egyptian women and youth—retails in outlets across the country, but its Cairo outposts are among its best-stocked. *nefertaribodycare.com*

EYE-POPPING RUGS

Kiliim, a social enterprise and homeware brand with showrooms in Maadi and Giza, gives the ancient kilim rug-weaving technique a contemporary spin with bright color-blocked designs and kaleidoscopic patterns. The start-up works closely with weaving cooperatives in Fowwa, a small village in the Nile Delta that was once home to more than 2,000 weaving workshops—now down to just 200—to help sustain the craft long into the future. *kiliim.com* CHRIS SCHALKX

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The colorful houses of Nyhavn, the city's iconic waterfront district

DANISH MODERN

In Copenhagen, progressive cooking, fresh design ideas, and a transformed waterfront all offer persuasive reasons to visit this summer—and beyond

Even with the world on pause, Copenhagen kept busy. Now it's ready to seduce travelers anew. Noma may be closing next year, but a group of young chefs is writing the next chapter of the New Nordic Food Manifesto. Cutting-edge design, always a draw here, is more prevalent than ever with the reopening last year of architect Kaare Klint's Designmuseum Danmark; this year, the city is the UNESCO World Capital of Architecture, with events themed around sustainability. Emerging neighborhoods are easier than ever to explore via Copenhagen's world-class biking infrastructure and steadily expanding metro system, while the much-anticipated summer opening of the Opera Park will add to the buzzy waterfront. Its 19th-century-style gardens and walking paths will be a perfect counterpoint to the glass and limestone of the Royal Danish Opera House—the kind of juxtaposition that makes the Danish capital so unique. Copenhagen is always a good idea, now more than ever. ARATI MENON

PHOTOGRAPH: JEROME GALLAND

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PROMOTION

POST

2023

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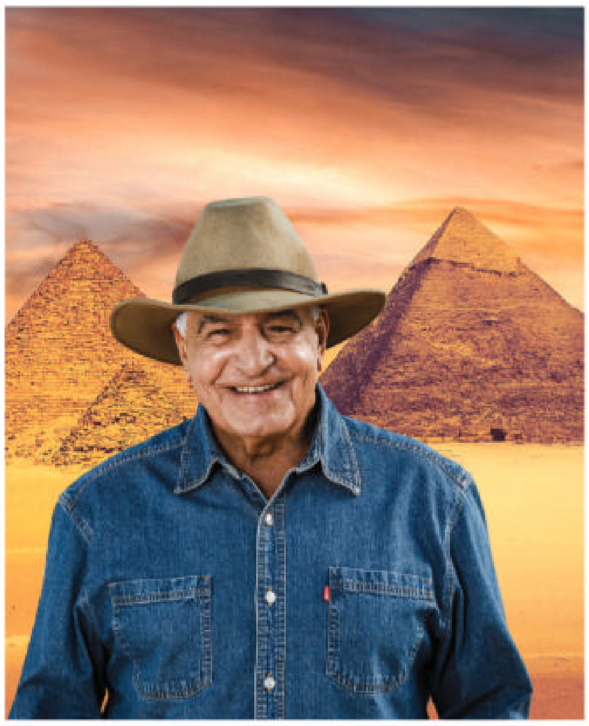

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Little Luxuries

Long a bastion of traditional hotels, Copenhagen is witnessing the growth of small but spectacular rental properties

From **Kanalhuset,** a canalside home turned apartment hotel, to **The Darling,** a design-forward guesthouse, accommodations here have never been more diverse or visually interesting. The most exciting new player is **Villa Canada,** a stately five-room, two-suite rental in Østerbro. Built in 1918 and designed by architect Albert Oppenheim, it was formerly the residence of Canadian ambassadors. Inside, original details like decorated ceilings and hand-painted wallpaper have been left intact, but there are also modern creature comforts like heated bathroom floors and an elevator. Expect the level of service you'd get from your favorite hotel, along with meals prepared by chefs from Michelin-starred restaurants like Alouette's Nick Curtin and a 1,100-bottle wine cellar. A long soak in the gilded bathtub is encouraged. *From $13,995 per night; villacanada.dk*

SEE THE SEA

Copenhageners use their harborfront the way many city denizens use their parks. Below, four great places to take in the water views

» COPENHOT, NORDHAVN
At this popular weekend hangout spot, guests sip wine between sauna sessions and take in the panoramic sea views from wood hot tubs. Try to nab a spot in the glass-walled "floating sauna," right on the water. *copenhot.com*

» KRØYERS PLADS
This waterfront development includes a wood deck where visitors often lounge, sometimes jumping into the sea. The setting, with views of the colorful houses of Nyhavn, is unsurpassed, and Broens Gadekøkken, Copenhagen's famed food market, is right next door.

» BUTCHERS HEAT
Clothing is optional at this pair of no-frills mobile saunas parked on the harbor in hip Refshaleøen. Be sure to book a SaunaGus, an aromatherapy session that pairs searing heat with '70s rock and relaxing light. *butchersheat.dk*

» LA BANCHINA
People-watching at this one-stop shop for sauna, drinks, and farm-to-table food is some of the best in town. Order smoked spelt dockside. *labanchina.dk*

THE INSIDER

Anne-Louise Sommer, director of the newly reopened Designmuseum Danmark, on where she goes for inspiration

» THORVALDSEN'S MUSEUM "Its iconic ultramarine ceilings, impressive architecture, and collection of Danish neoclassical sculptures by Bertel Thorvaldsen make it one of the city's most tranquil oases."

» CISTERNERNE
"A unique subterranean space, the old water reservoir has housed exhibitions from Jeppe Hein and Tómas Saraceno. It will host South Korean conceptual artist Kimsooja through November."

» CIRKELBROEN
"This Olafur Eliasson–designed bridge has five 'masts' that rotate to allow boats to pass through the canal. It beautifully illustrates the intersection of architecture, art, and design."

» ETAGE PROJECTS
"At this centrally located art-and-design gallery, you can marvel at lamps and vases by Danish artist FOS, unique ceramics by Karl Monies, and tinted mirrors by Sabine Marcelis."

PHOTOGRAPHS: LINE KLEIN, BENEDETTA ANGHILERI

The open kitchen at the Japanese-inflected Kōnā

On the Menu

Now that the hyperlocal hegemony of New Nordic is fading, what's next? Far-flung flavors—with a Danish twist

» Tables are hard to come by at **Jatak,** where chef Jonathan Tam infuses the approach that he honed at the now shuttered Relæ with Asian flavors in dishes like the shatteringly crisp sea buckthorn tempura. Be sure to sit at the kitchen counter and watch the chefs (silently) prepare your 12-course dinner, which could include the flavorful pumpkin cheung fun and the Instagram-famous egg tart. *jatakcph.com*

» Around the corner from 17th-century Rosenborg Castle on Farimagsgade is **Juju,** a modern-casual Korean eatery from Noma alum Kristian Baumann. On its small à la carte menu are banchan, mandoo, Korean fried chicken, and sesame ice cream. In the spring, its older sibling Koan will open in a new location with a menu that marries Baumann's South Korean roots with Danish ingredients. *jujucph.dk*

» At **Donda Deli,** the newer, more casual outpost of Christianshavn hot spot Donda, the menu is full of Latin American flavors. Think snacks and small plates served alongside tortillas, árbol mayo, and guajillo salsa, as well as a selection of natural wines. The restaurant's cozy vibe—pink walls, warm wood, and Poulsen lighting—will encourage you to linger. *donda.dk*

» From the team behind the beloved Slurp Ramen Joint comes **Kōnā,** a Japanese izakaya and cocktail bar in Carlsberg Byen. Pair the chicken karaage or a scallop skewer with an Austrian Gewürztraminer for a good night out—and for an even better time, head downstairs to the U-shaped counter for a special ramen menu imported from Slurp. *konacph.com*

» Former Geranium head chef Will King-Smith and wife Megan Leung have been pulling in the crowds at **Goldfinch** with excellent Cantonese in a setting made for dates. Expect traditional dishes you'd be served in a Chinese home, like char siu and roast duck, alongside more modern ones, such as Hong Kong–style French toast. *goldfinch.dk*

GARDEN PARTY

Europe's most famous theme park embarks on a season of celebration

The iconic Tivoli Gardens oozes old-world charm, but it's far from stodgy. This summer, to celebrate its 180th birthday, the park will open Kilden, a new sustainability-focused restaurant; a Danish wine and produce market; and pop-ups of several Michelin-starred restaurants, including Knystaforsen from rural Sweden, which will bring its critically acclaimed forage-and-fire approach into the heart of the city. Concerts, fireworks, and ballets will follow, and of course there are always the rides. *tivoli.dk*

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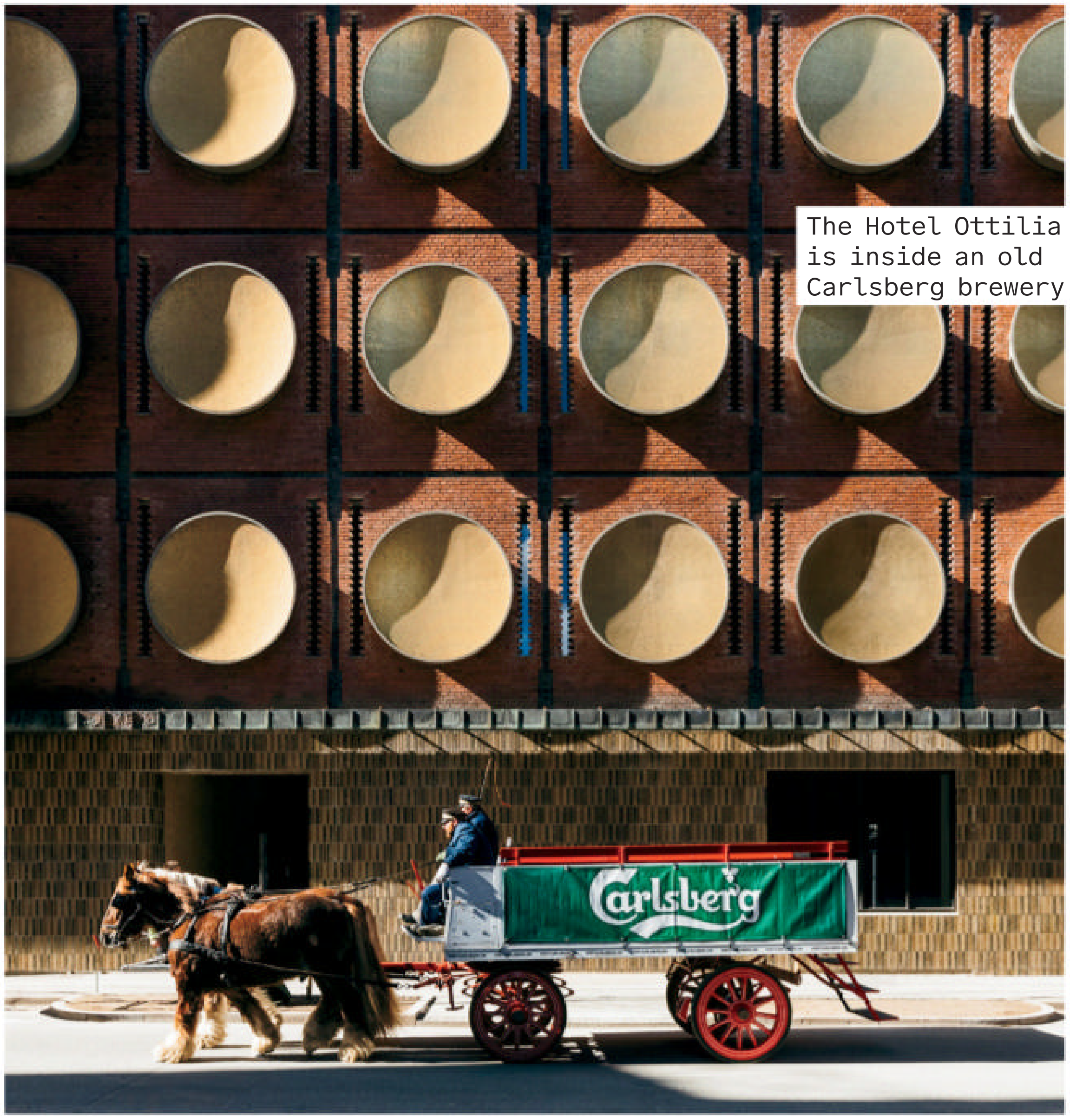


The Hotel Ottilia is inside an old Carlsberg brewery

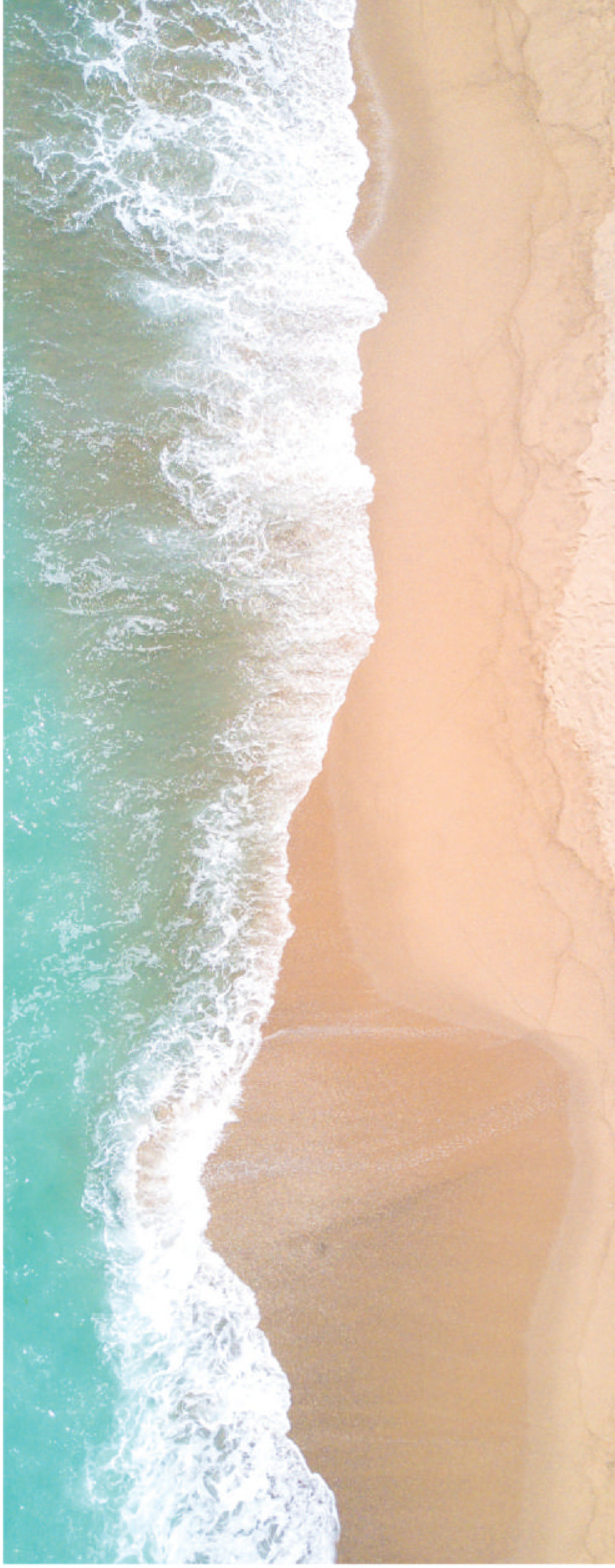
Urban Renaissance

A stream of hotels, restaurants, and shops has made the industrial area of Carlsberg Byen the hippest place in town

Carlsberg Byen used to be accessible only to its workers. Now, more than a decade after it opened to the public, the former brewery district wedged between Frederiksberg and Vesterbro has become a go-to destination for both locals and visitors. Set in an iconic building with round windows where Carlsberg beer was once brewed, **Hotel Ottilia,** a soaring contemporary hotel from local company Brøchner Hotels, was one of the first to arrive. Following suit was a Copenhagen outpost of the global brand **Aire Ancient Baths,** which repurposed an 1881 building to house its collection of hot and cold pools. For the weekend crowd, there's **Cadence,** an easygoing coffee shop and bakery that serves up sweet-potato hotcakes and blackberry fastelavnsboller (cardamom buns), as well as **Surt,** a low-key pizza joint making wood-fired sourdough pies. At the Michelin-starred **Studio,** it's a slightly more upscale affair: Head chef Christoffer Sørensen, winner of the Michelin Guide's Young Chef Award in 2021, whips up plates of scallops with green strawberries and horseradish. Unsurprisingly, there's no shortage of design shops (this *is* Copenhagen, after all), including **Carl Hansen & Søn,** which stocks brands like Hans J. Wegner and Arne Jacobsen. Meanwhile, **Von Bartha,** the first international outpost of the Swiss gallery, features contemporary artists such as Camille Graeser.

ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY MARY HOLLAND

PHOTOGRAPH: ANDREAS RAUN ROSENDAHL



~~Mallorca:~~ *seen it*
~~Côte d'Azur:~~ *done it*
~~Santorini:~~ *tried it*
Paradise Island: *ready for it*

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Chica Capeto in her mother's art-filled home

Hotel Arpoador, one of Rio's iconic beachfront hotels

THE RIGHT WAY TO RIO

Artist and fashion designer Chica Capeto shares her favorite spots in and around Brazil's sexy seaside city

» Hotel Arpoador "My boyfriend and I often go for staycations. We almost always choose Hotel Arpoador. It has a really cool triangular rooftop pool and is one of the only properties in Rio that isn't separated from the beach by the road, so it almost feels as if you're waking up on the sand. It's calmingly minimal, and I adore the slightly crunchy pancakes with maple syrup at breakfast."

» Pedra do Sal "This area is kind of touristy but so cool—it's a part of town where people just park their cars and get out and dance the samba. Everyone drinks Caipirinhas and sings along to the classics."

» Casa Bicho and Casa Voa "There are some really interesting artists' enclaves, like Casa Bicho, in a series of concrete arches under Corcovado Mountain, and the pretty, whitewashed Casa Voa—places where creatives have studios and hold exhibitions and sell prints. My home is full of art, and so much of it is from going to these places."

» Bira de Guaratiba "About an hour west of the city, I love going to the white sandy beach at Grumari and then heading up the hill to this simple restaurant. It has great seafood dishes, like pastels with shrimp and vegetables, and the most incredible views of the Marambaia Beach, which is protected by the military, so it's often empty."

» Quartinho Bar "There are a lot of great bars in the Botafogo neighborhood, but one of my favorites is Quartinho Bar, which has this great vibe—from the neon sign outside to the colorful barn-like space with brick walls and bright art. I love their Bloody Marys, and they do amazing finger food, like fried tapioca cubes with spicy pepper jam." AS TOLD TO TOBY SKINNER

Quartinho Bar is laid-back with mismatched furniture and great Bloody Marys

PHOTOGRAPHS: ANDRÉ DUVIVIER, LEONARDO FINOTTI, MZNO / FILIPE MARQUES

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STAY AWHILE

An increase in overnights at select ports is allowing cruise passengers to experience destinations at all hours

A view of Ibiza's Dalt Vila, or Old Town, at dusk

Night owls, take note. Big changes are happening in the cruising industry that will help you explore a port of call more easily once the sun goes down. Historically, various factors—tight sailing schedules, old-fashioned itineraries that favor daytime activities, and a desire to maximize the time passengers spend in onboard restaurants and bars—have meant that gangplanks are usually up by cocktail hour. But with guests seeking ways to explore destinations more slowly and deliberately, cruise lines have been introducing more late-night and early-morning departures.

"We saw an uptick in passengers requesting port overnights, specifically in ports such as Barcelona and Rio de Janeiro, where there is a lively nightlife," says Barbara Muckerman, CEO of Silversea Cruises. The company started offering the option in both cities last year and plans to do the same in Bangkok and Ho Chi Minh City on voyages starting this October. Regent Seven Seas Cruises will allow guests to stay through dawn at select ports like Hong Kong on its *Seven Seas Explorer,* while passengers aboard Virgin Voyages' *Valiant Lady* will be able to hit the clubs till the wee hours in party spots like Ibiza while their vessel docks for extended stretches.

The new practice benefits destinations too—more time on dry land means more money goes into the pockets of local businesses. According to travel specialist Tom Baker of CruiseCenter, one result of this shift has been that travelers have become more inclined to book extensive sightseeing tours and even stays at onshore hotels. Early birds get something out of it also: experiencing a city as it wakes up. Imagine sipping your first coffee of the day at a café in Palma's historic center, remembering the Iberian suckling pig you had for dinner at a nearby restaurant the night before. JESSICA PUCKETT

PHOTOGRAPH: CHRIS SORENSEN/GALLERY STOCK

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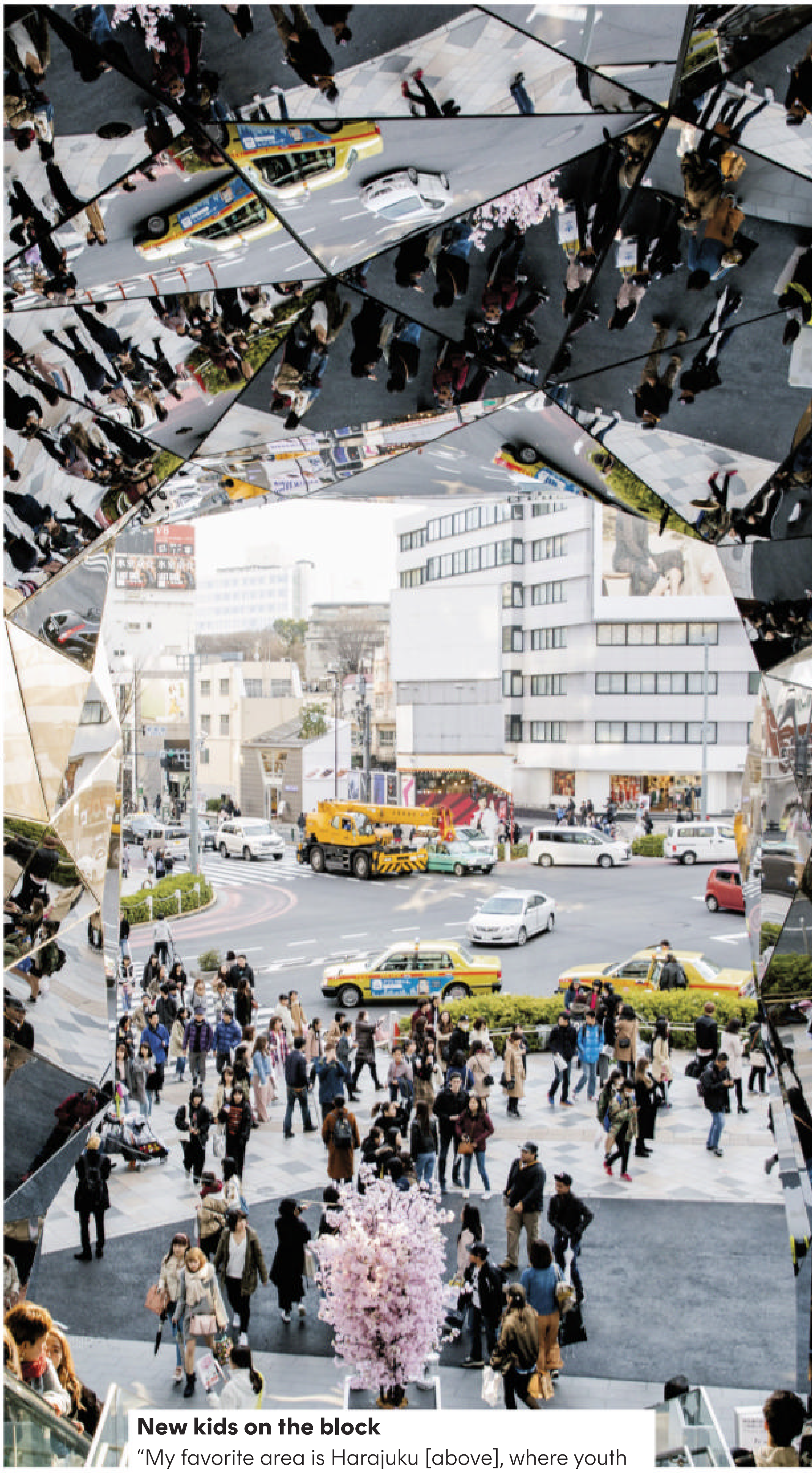
ELECTRIC FEEL

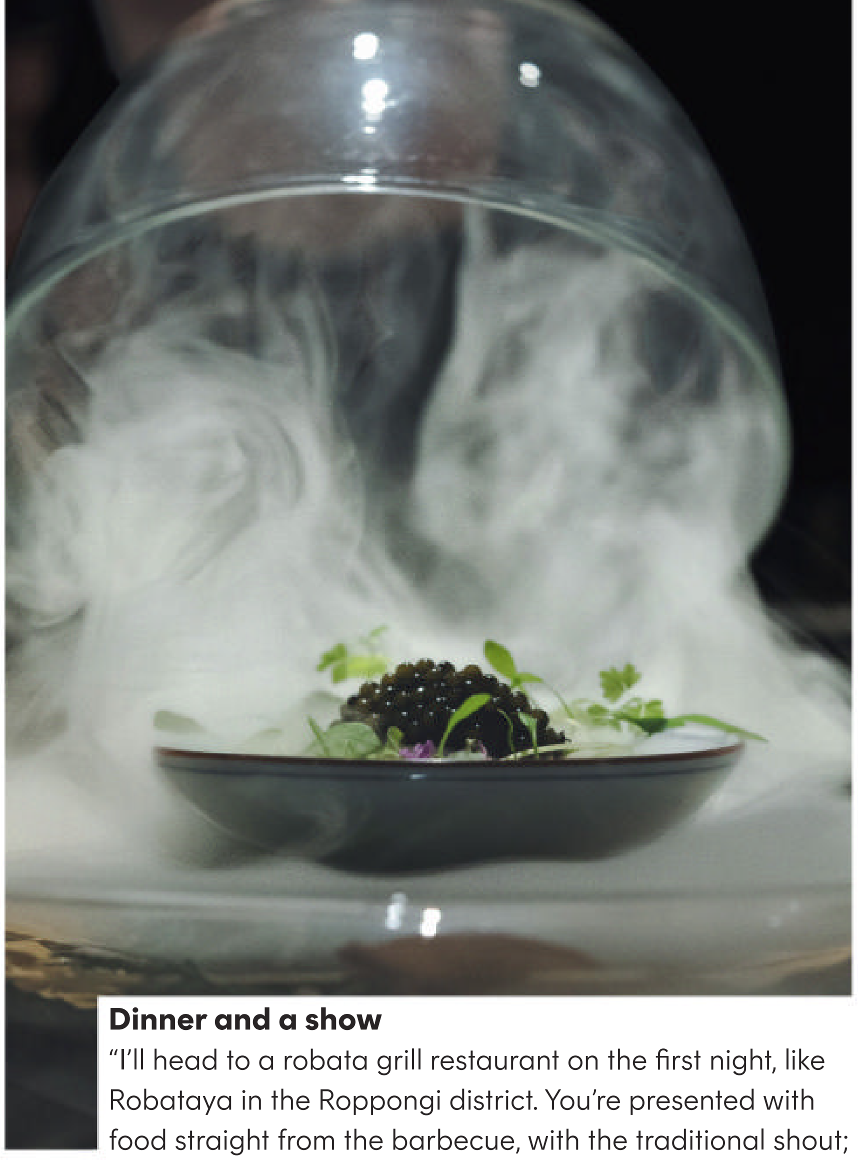
Buzzy, always-on Tokyo is a perpetual source of inspiration—and sensory overload—for Jimmy Choo creative director Sandra Choi

Love at first sight: That's how the British designer Sandra Choi describes her earliest encounter with Japan's capital in 2013, when she visited after taking the reins at her uncle's storied fashion house. In the decade since, she has gone again and again, each time finding fresh fodder for her work. "The inspiration offered by the city is endless," says Choi, who recently collaborated with *Sailor Moon* creator Naoko Takeuchi on a capsule collection to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the iconic manga. She particularly loves Tokyo's penchant for pragmatic, high-quality design that innovates while honoring what came before. "Multifaceted, the old with the new, the Zen with the futurism," she says. "It's a bit like Jimmy Choo." Here she shares her favorite places to absorb the city's singular culture, from vibrant, trendsetting neighborhoods to lively homestyle restaurants that help fend off jet lag. FLORRIE THOMAS



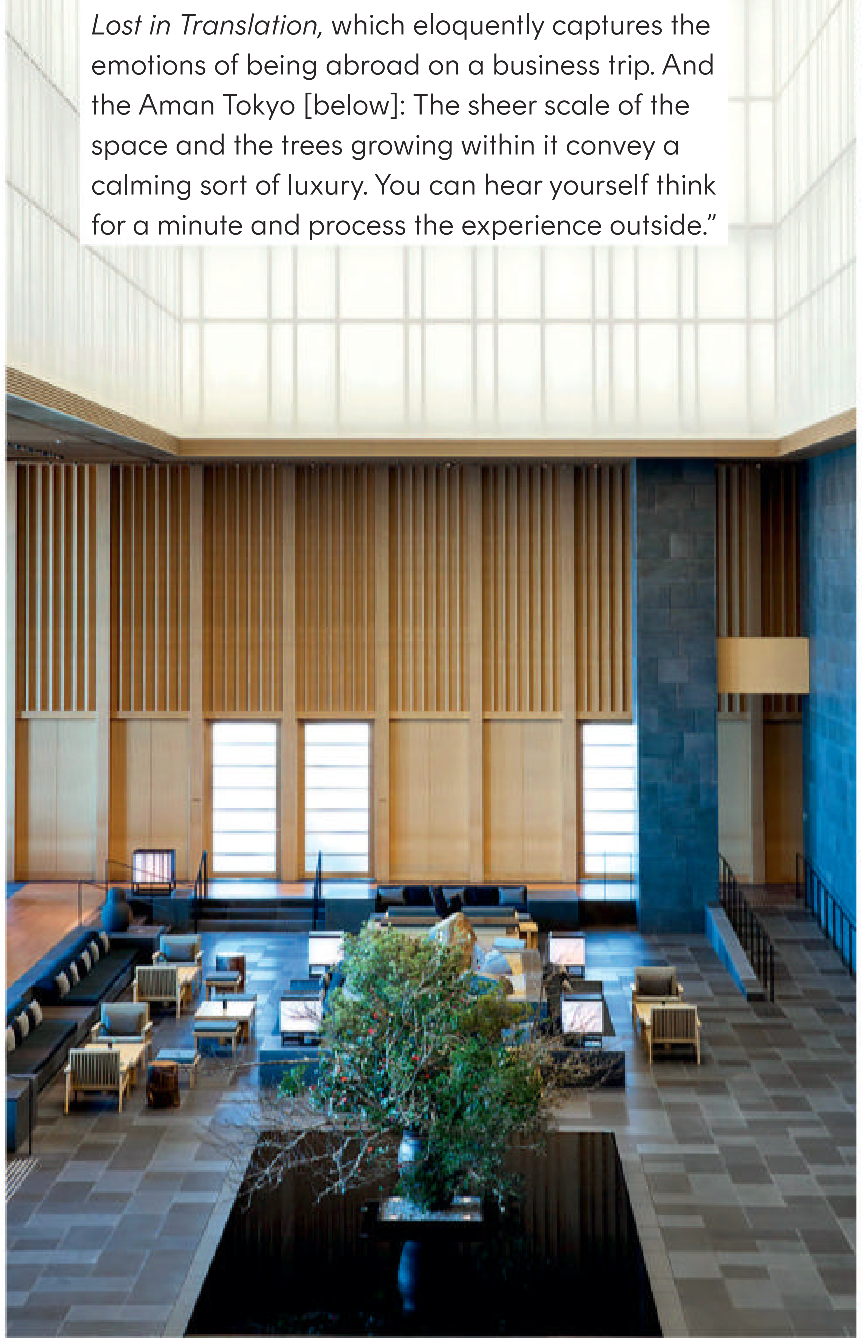
New kids on the block
"My favorite area is Harajuku [above], where youth culture is thriving and the teens are experimenting with fashion. The shopping and the sense of a generation on a journey to find their identity is so inspiring. They are using fashion as an expression of who they want to be and what tribe they want to belong to. It's also home to the Watari Museum of Contemporary Art, which hosts cutting-edge temporary exhibitions."

A moment of peace
“The Meiji Jingu, a Shinto shrine in Shibuya [pictured left are barrels of sake left as gifts by visitors], sits in a forest between two of Tokyo’s most industrial districts; going there is like entering a magical portal to a tranquil parallel universe. There are shrines all over the city.”



Dinner and a show
“I’ll head to a robata grill restaurant on the first night, like Robataya in the Roppongi district. You’re presented with food straight from the barbecue, with the traditional shout; the theater of it eliminates the need for small talk, perfect when you’re adjusting to a new time zone. At the 12-seat Sushi M [above], top sommelier Yoshinobu Kimura and skilled sushi chef Michimasa Nakamura have partnered up to pair sushi with sake and wine, a spin on tradition.”

Dream sequence
“The Park Hyatt Tokyo is iconic. I think anyone who visits Tokyo can identify with the mood of *Lost in Translation,* which eloquently captures the emotions of being abroad on a business trip. And the Aman Tokyo [below]: The sheer scale of the space and the trees growing within it convey a calming sort of luxury. You can hear yourself think for a minute and process the experience outside.”



Curios for the cabinet
“I love to go vintage shopping, and Tokyo has some of the best spots anywhere. BerBerJin, in Shibuya [above], has the most coveted collection of vintage denim, branded apparel, and accessories dating back to the early 1900s. And no trip is complete without a visit to the department store Tokyu Hands, where you can find irreverent bits and bobs: special sponges for polishing kettles, playful cutlery and bento boxes for kids, and an entire floor dedicated to stationery. I can spend hours there.”

PHOTOGRAPHS: ATLANTIDE PHOTOTRAVEL/GETTY IMAGES, SUSHI M TOKYO, ROBERTA VALERIO, JET DELA CRUZ/UNSPLASH, JESSICA SAMPLE/GALLERY STOCK, SANDRA CHOI

PROMOTION

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how to slow down now

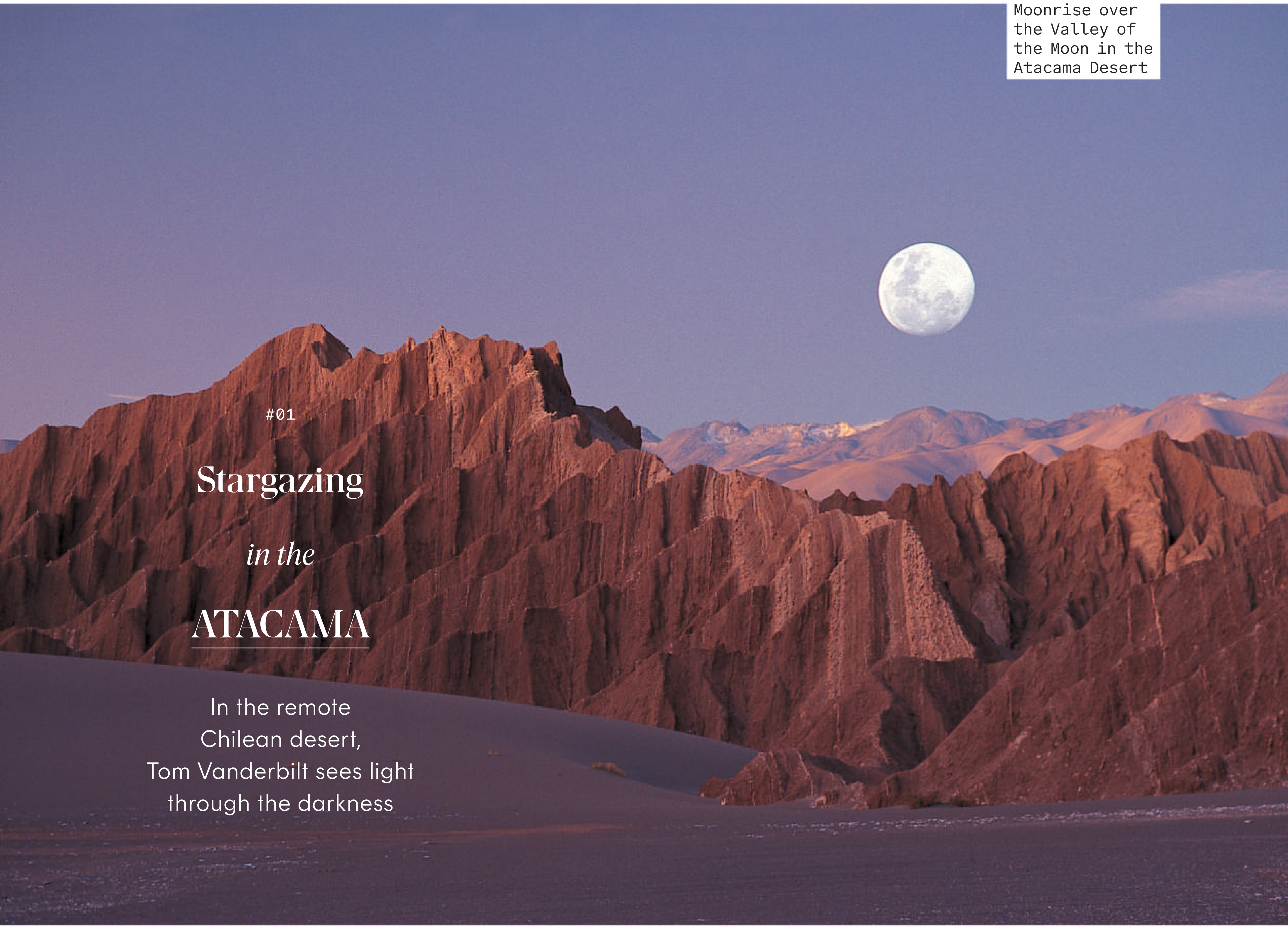
Suddenly, the catchphrase *slow travel* is everywhere. But what does it even mean? Yes, it's about spending more time in a place rather than hitting the highlights and moving on. But it's also about traveling more mindfully and more sustainably, connecting more deeply with the people and culture of a destination, losing yourself in the daily rhythms. The eight stories that follow show how many ways there are to do that, from a family stargazing expedition in the Atacama Desert and a cruise down the Brahmaputra in the Indian state of Assam to a trek into the heart of Oneida Nation in Wisconsin. The one constant? Never rushing things, so the spirit of wonder can overtake you.

Approaching Laguna Santa Rosa, in the Atacama Desert's Nevado Tres Cruces National Park

OUR SPECIALISTS CAN HELP!

Good travel advisers slow you down by getting you deeper into a place and its culture. A few of our favorites offer itineraries inspired by the stories on the following pages. Find the complete list of 2023 *Condé Nast Traveler* Top Specialists at **cntraveler.com/travel-specialists**

PHOTOGRAPH: JENNY ZARINS



Moonrise over the Valley of the Moon in the Atacama Desert

#01

Stargazing *in the* ATACAMA

In the remote Chilean desert, Tom Vanderbilt sees light through the darkness

THERE IS BATHING, there is sunbathing, and there is shinrin-yoku, the recently trendy Japanese concept of "forest bathing." On a typically cloudless night in Chile's Atacama Desert, as my family and I reclined on metal chaise longues, looking up at the wildly expansive southern sky, I experienced something totally new: starbathing.

When Pía Urbano Mena, the astronomy guide at the Nayara Alto Atacama, turned off the ambient lights at the hotel's small observatory, there was a magic, neck-tingling moment as the inky blackness absolutely enveloped us. "It's going to take around 15 minutes for our eyes to adjust to darkness," Urbano Mena said. "At first, you'll hardly see anything. But then you'll see everything."

Just before, I'd been drinking a pisco sour in the hotel bar while watching the Chilean national soccer team take on Brazil. Now Urbano Mena beamed a laser point skyward, taking us on an exhilarating tour of the heavens. There was Sirius, there was Betelgeuse—or, technically, the memory of those stars, as the light reaching us had emanated years before. The Indigenous people of the Atacama gave the name *mayu* to the riverlike band of celestial objects that dominates

» PLAN IT

For a one-of-a-kind astronomical itinerary, **Black Tomato**'s seven-day Atacama experience includes guided stargazing as well as adventures like private trekking along the Rio Salado and flamingo-spotting at Laguna Chaxa. *From $19,500; blacktomato.com*

Looking out at the night sky from the Nayara Alto Atacama lodge

the center of our sky; it was, Urbano Mena said, "the place where the souls of the ancestors go to live." It's ancient mythology, yes, but modern science, in a sense, agrees: The elements from some ancient stars helped create our life-giving sun. "Our ancestors," she said, "are the stars."

There is no better place to gaze upon that interstellar history than the Altiplano of northern Chile's Atacama Desert. It's blessed with high altitude and a relative lack of settlement, but most important, it's the world's driest nonpolar desert, so its skies are largely free of interfering moisture, offering the world's clearest vantage point on our galaxy—and beyond. No wonder all the big science agencies have viewing facilities here.

After the past few years of being inside far more than usual, of having my worldview compressed to the size of a screen a few feet away, it felt hugely liberating to come to this remote place, to look not only up but also out—across shimmering salt flats, at distant Andean peaks, toward seemingly endless horizons.

Alto Atacama is the first property outside Costa Rica for the eco-hospitality brand Nayara. It opened just prior to the pandemic, then was shuttered until reopening in September 2021. Our stay at the lodge was a busy one. We traveled by mountain bike into the nearby Devil's Throat, a series of twisting slot canyons. We hiked the Rainbow Valley, ringed by striated peaks that looked like Neapolitan ice cream. We visited the Valley of the Moon, a landscape so barren that it's been used by NASA as a stand-in for Mars. And in a setting framed by active and inactive volcanoes, the snowcapped peak known in the Indigenous Kunza language as Licancabur always loomed largest.

When the altitude caught up with us, we stayed on property, feeding bunches of algaroba pods to the hotel's resident llamas, or lazing around one of the pools. A few times, we caught a shuttle into San Pedro de Atacama, the nearby town. At first, it reminded me of Mos Eisley, the noisome spaceport in *Star Wars,* with its trinket sellers and tour operators. But soon, as we ate ice cream in the plaza, even it cast a spell.

Late in the day, we went for walks along a dry riverbed close to Alto Atacama, past the archaeological site where a pre-Columbian fortress is being unearthed, watching the shifting hues of the lunar terrain. As Urbano Mena had said of the night sky when we first arrived, the landscape looked like nothing. But after our eyes adjusted, we began to see everything.

PHOTOGRAPHS: NAYARA RESORTS

MORE **CELESTIAL** ADVENTURES

» Norway

Torunn Tronsvang, the founder of **Up Norway,** says now is the perfect moment to glimpse the northern lights in the town of Alta. NASA is predicting a bumper few years of solar activity, which means the aurora borealis will be more intense and more frequent than ever, reaching a climax in 2025. *Five days from $2,800; upnorway.com*

» South Korea

Yeongyang Firefly Eco Park, the first park in Asia designated as a Silver-tier International Dark Sky Park by the International Dark-Sky Association, is 175 miles from Seoul. **Abercrombie & Kent**'s Gerald Hatherly can plan a two-night excursion to gaze at the Milky Way, or—for those who want a soundtrack with their planet-spotting—attend a night concert. *From $1,300; akdmc.com*

» Utah

Due to its dry weather, high elevation, and vast empty spaces, the southern area of the state offers unparalleled nighttime visibility. Melissa Wu of **Woodlyn Travel** suggests Bryce Canyon National Park as an ideal base camp, which allows visitors to partake in daytime activities like hiking and ATV tours. *Four days from $2,000; woodlyntravel.com*

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The Monastery of Agios Nikolaos Ntiliou, in the city of Ioannina

North of Metsovo village, horses graze in the Pindus mountain range

#02

Hiking in NORTHWEST GREECE

On a winter sojourn into a craggy corner of the mainland, Sarah Souli finds a place of her own

"EVERY DAY WE LOOK at these mountains," Spiros Tsoumanis tells me from the terrace of Astra Inn, his restaurant and guesthouse in Papingo, a tiny village in the Epirus region of northwestern Greece. "And it's like looking at them for the first time." It's dusk, and behind him the ridge of the range looms skyward, its jagged peaks catching and reflecting the light. Bundled up against the cold, thin air, we watch as the rock face turns a brilliant purple-red and then deepens to a velvety black.

I first discovered this pocket of the country seven years ago, while traveling around with my then partner, who is Greek. We ventured into Zagorohoria, a rugged part of Epirus in the Pindus Mountains known for its cluster of 46 traditional stone villages, and wandered among them, hiking over vaulted stone bridges and snacking on lamb chops in modest tavernas. The relationship ended, but my love affair with the area continued. Last December, I decided to return to Epirus—on my own this time.

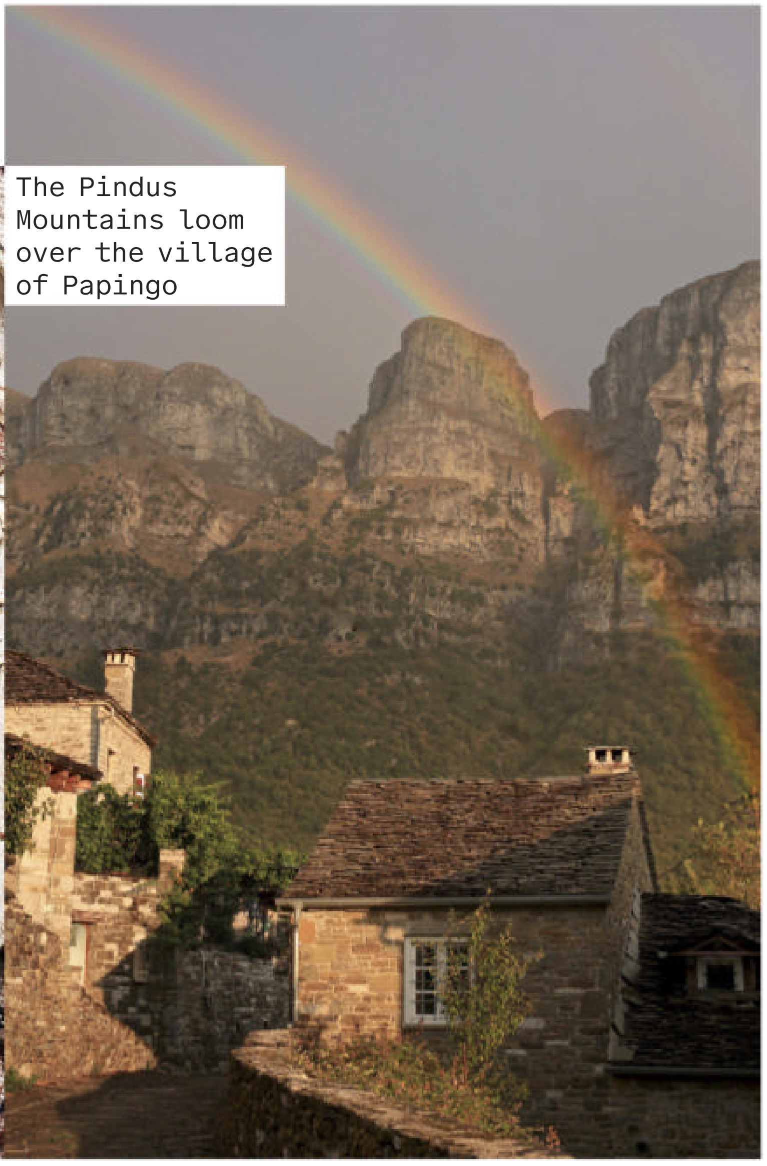
Ioannina, the gateway to the region, is a short flight from Athens, where I've lived since 2017. Built along Pamvotis Lake, the city is famous for its Ottoman ruins, which are some of the best preserved in the country. During the day I spend there, I stop by the family-owned bakery Select for bougatsa, a custard pie, then hop a ferry to the island at the center of the lake to see the frescoes of the 13th-century Monastery of Philanthropenoi: ancient monotheistic Greek philosophers and gruesome depictions of martyrs' deaths.

The next morning, I make the hour-long drive to Papingo, famed for its rock pools—places where the water, trickling down from the mountaintop, has eroded the karst landscape to create a series of glassy terraces and waterfalls.

"This is a hiker's paradise," Vassilis Nasiakos, owner of Saxonis Guesthouse, tells me over coffee. In spite of the gathering rain clouds, we forge ahead with our planned trek along Voidomatis Springs Trail. After a short drive to the nearby village of Vikos, we begin our trudge down

PHOTOGRAPHS: ANDREA PISTOLESI/GETTY IMAGES, CHRISTOS DRAZOS, LIZ SCHAFFER

A salad of scorched amaranth greens at the restaurant Metsovo 1350m, inside the Grand Forest Metsovo hotel



The Pindus Mountains loom over the village of Papingo

to the icy-blue river that cuts through the gorge, passing just one other pair of hikers. On the riverside, I spot the 16th-century Panagia Spiliotissa Monastery and duck through its hobbit-size doors, surprised to find another spectacular set of Orthodox frescoes. Afterward, we sit by the springs, which bubble up from beneath tree roots, and slowly peel clementines, gathering our strength for the hike back up.

I leave Papingo at dawn and drive a few hours southeast to the Grand Forest Metsovo. Built in the traditional style of the area, with flat wooden roofs and vaulted ceilings, the resort sits nestled in the mountains with a view of Metsovo village. "This is a mountain with a hotel, not the other way around," says owner Ellie Barmpagiannis as we sit before the lobby's roaring fireplace.

The next thing I know, I'm lost in the forest with resident truffle hunter Katerina Nola, who grips the leashes of two wily Lagotto Romagnolo pups as a third darts into a stream.

Truffle hunting goes at lightning speed—you have to move quickly to grab the goods before the dogs eat them. We collect a dozen before heading back to Nola's cottage to enjoy a parade of dishes incorporating our haul: creamy pasta, roasted boar with potato gratin, and for dessert, yogurt and honey. She sends me off with a bottle of truffle oil and a white truffle the size of my fist.

On my last morning, I wake to a dusting of snow—the season's first. I drive to the airport under a white blanket of silence, contemplating the scenes of these past few days. Now I can say that Epirus belongs to me alone.

» PLAN IT

While the writer arranged her own trip to Greece's Epirus region, Top Travel Specialist Thodoris Athanasiadis of **Hellenic Adventures** can craft a similar itinerary—including hiking among historic sites and monasteries. *Price upon request; hellenicadventures.com*

MORE **HISTORICAL** TREKS

» England

Artisans of Leisure founder Ashley Isaacs Ganz recommends the Peak District National Park for travelers who like to combine hiking and cultural pursuits. Custom itineraries can include stops at historic estates, famous gardens, UNESCO sites, and ancient ruins. *Eight days from $15,000; artisansofleisure.com*

» Vietnam

Walk along terraced rice paddies and through perfectly preserved villages during a seven-night journey from Hanoi to the northern provinces of Ninh Bình and Hòa Bình. The trip is designed by **Butterfield & Robinson** specialist Nathan Lane to help visitors make memorable connections with locals. *From $9,000; butterfield.com*

» Morocco

Rather than driving to the Merzouga Desert directly from Marrakech—a 10-hour haul—**Wix Squared** director Alex Wix suggests breaking up the journey into a series of one-night stops. You'll delve deeper into Moroccan culture while staying in small towns and wandering through the foothills of the Anti-Atlas. *Ten days from $8,700; wixsquared.com*

#03

River Cruising

in

INDIA

Sailing down Assam's mighty Brahmaputra, Diya Kohli discovers a centuries-old flow of reverence and transience

PHOTOGRAPH: ALISTAIR TAYLOR-YOUNG

"YOU HAVE TO RECOGNIZE THE WATERS. Here, GPS and maps don't work, as the islands appear and disappear and the depths keep changing," says Bimal Mondol, the shipmaster who expertly steers our vessel, the *ABN Charaidew II,* across the Brahmaputra River in Assam, India. It's early December, and we are ready to embark on ecotourism giant &Beyond's return to cruising in India, designed in collaboration with local operator Assam Bengal Navigation. The careful itinerary reflects the partners' shared values regarding land, community, and wildlife conservation.

As a weak sun breaks through the winter fog, we board the elegant 18-suite ship. Everything is a showcase of Assamese culture—the 19th-century rattan furniture, the handwoven fabrics, the local art hanging on the walls. There is a robust collection of books on Assam, as well as an onboard naturalist and historian who can fill in any gaps during our daily excursions.

Growing up in the neighboring state of West Bengal, I first learned of the Brahmaputra, a vast braided river that is the widest in India, from geography lessons. But Assam, like the other states of the northeast, remained largely unknown to me beyond the textbook lessons on its tea, oil fields, and silk production. For years, relentless conflict prevented much tourism to the region, so even for most Indians today, a visit is a chance to discover centuries of culture.

» PLAN IT
&Beyond is accepting bookings for its inaugural Iconic Brahmaputra River Cruise in February 2024. A 13-day, 12-night sailing through Assam includes full board, transfers, fees, and safaris. *From $7,800; andbeyond.com*

Our cruise takes us downstream past palaces, temples, and grand monuments built by the erstwhile Ahoms, the ruling dynasty of Assam until the 19th century. We watch the Mising community weave—the women spin brightly colored textiles on homemade looms and the men make cane baskets. We taste robust cups of Assam tea in colonial bungalows built by European traders.

On Majuli, the Brahmaputra's largest settled island with a →

A female elephant at Kaziranga National Park

A tea plucker on a tea plantation in Assam

population of over 160,000, the river encroaches constantly on homes, rice fields, and village schools. For the Assamese Neo-Vaishnavites, a Hindu denomination devoted to Vishnu, the god of preservation, the island is a sacred cultural hub with 22 satras, or monasteries, that safeguard traditions of spirituality, art, and craft while serving as repositories for ancient artifacts. Yet these bastions face an existential threat as the island shrinks due to river erosion.

Daily safaris take us into the heart of the forest at Kaziranga National Park, the state's best-known natural reserve and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Known for its rhinoceroses and elephants, it is also located on the Brahmaputra, and it too is vulnerable. Each time a monsoon comes, the Brahmaputra floods up to 95 percent of the park, submerging it and replenishing its water bodies. "For the animals, it is a matter of habit," says Bumoni Phukan, our safari guide. "They swim to higher ground to escape the rising waters and return when the levels recede."

Human intervention plays an important role within Kaziranga. Watchtowers positioned across the park allow its rangers to spot injured animals and keep an eye out for poachers. I meet 30-year-old Anil Rongpa, who has been working in the Kaziranga National Park for the past nine years, spending most of his days walking the forest on patrol. Like many of his fellow rangers, Rongpa is a foot soldier in one of India's most successful conservation efforts: At Kaziranga, the greater one-horned rhinoceros has been brought back from the brink of extinction.

On the last day of our cruise, the ship's crew spots a tiger. By the time I come up to the deck, it is long gone, but what I witness is still breathtaking. To the east, a herd of swamp deer stands among the stubby trees of Kaziranga's northern zone. A vast raft floats to the west, steered by two men who are using the makeshift vessel to transport their valuable bamboo crop. Egrets fly overhead. Directly ahead is a ferry carrying people and their groceries, motorbikes, and bicycles. We follow its ephemeral trail, just as boats on the Brahmaputra have done for ages.

MORE SMALL-SHIP **CRUISES**

» Antarctica

Mary Jean Tully of **Tully Luxury Travel** can arrange a private flight over the Drake Passage that meets up with Silversea's *Silver Endeavour* during its sailing to Antarctica, shortening the voyage and skipping the famously rough waters. *Twelve-day sailings from $12,000; tullyluxurytravel.com*

» Mississippi River

The *Viking Mississippi* provides unrivaled access to America's heartland, like private tours of the National Eagle Center in Minnesota and Mark Twain's childhood home in Missouri. Linda Allen-Speer, who operates **Cruises by Linda,** can help secure seemingly sold-out cabins. *Seven-night sailings from $5,000; cruisesbylinda.com*

» Persian Gulf

Explore Saudi Arabia, Oman, and the UAE in one fell swoop aboard the Windstar Cruises's *Star Legend.* **Travelwize** specialist Alyse Cori recommends a cruise as the best way to squeeze in as much history and adventure as possible in this part of the world. *Seven-night sailings from $3,000; travelwize.net*

PHOTOGRAPH: ALISTAIR TAYLOR-YOUNG

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#04

Being Mindful *in* SOUTH AFRICA

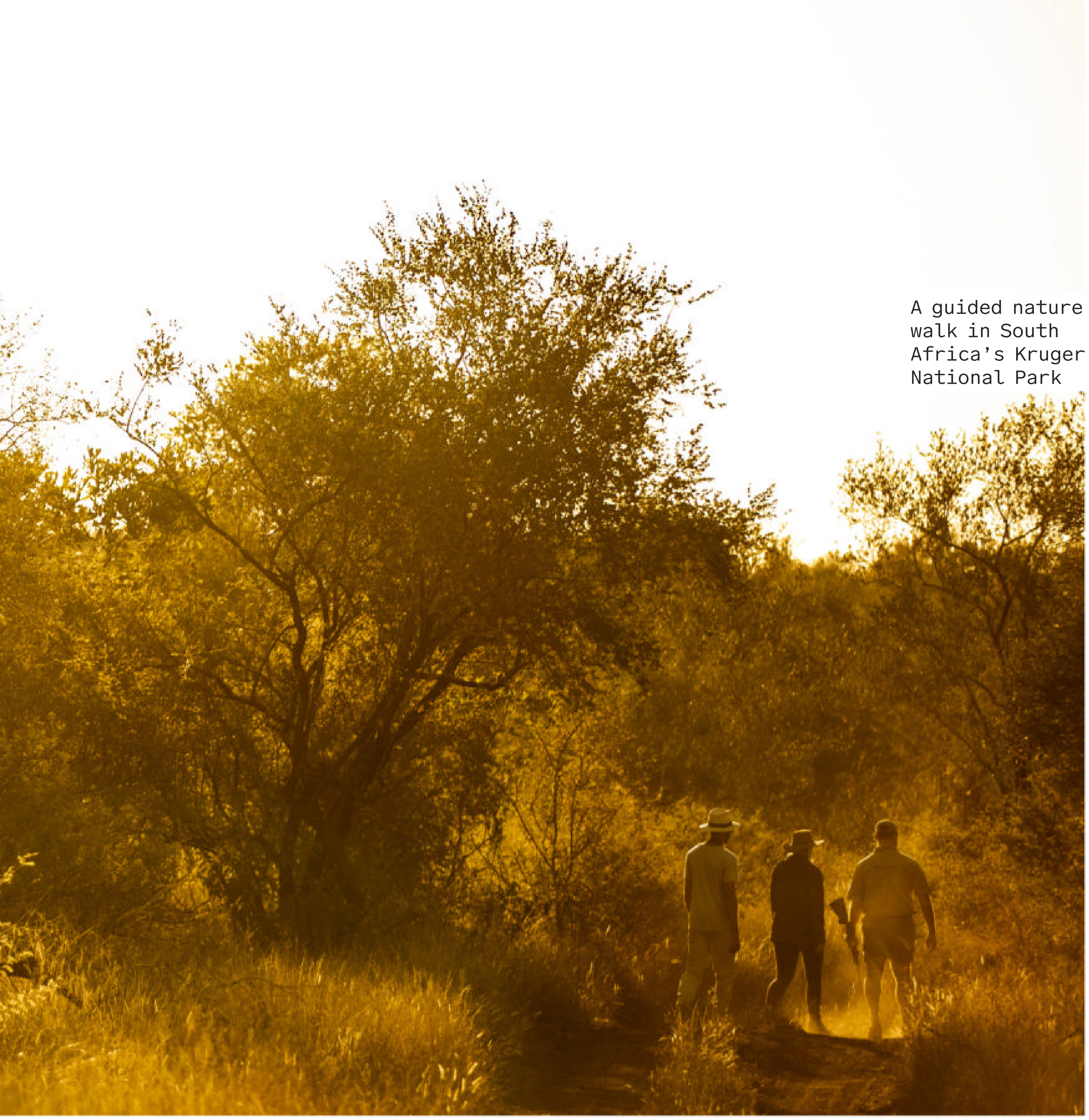
On safari in Kruger National Park, Mary Holland experiences a feast for the senses

IT FEELS COMPLETELY ORGANIC, stopping to listen to an elephant rustle in the bush for what might have been three minutes. Or five. Maybe 10. An accidental meditation in the shadow of Kruger's charcoal Lebombo Mountains, about as far from the populous center of South Africa as you can get. Though when you consider Singita's new holistic wellness approach at its lodges in Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Rwanda, and South Africa, perhaps it was deliberate. For the past few years, the luxury safari outfitter has been seamlessly introducing elements, like sound baths in the bush, that gently nudge guests into deeper experiences.

"The wellness concept is not a program," says CEO Jo Bailes. "It's something that's intuitive." He is hesitant even to describe the collection of experiences Singita has created, which range in scale and tangibility, as if talking about them will destroy their magic. Singita's 33,000-acre private concession is in the center of Kruger, near the Mozambique border, with two neighboring lodges, Singita Lebombo and Sweni, that are completely off-the-grid. We're sitting on a game vehicle, surrounded by volcanic mountains, a warm wind on our faces. Crickets and frogs chirp every now and then, and I can smell the sweetness of the wild sage bushes. It's a sensory explosion—a "wellness" experience in itself.

Nearly everything I do over the next two days is about becoming calmer and more mindful. I begin with sunrise yoga on a deck overlooking the valley, where giraffes cluster in the distance. A massage therapist tends to my muscles with tools like a Zimbabwean pinda, a small sack filled with baobab seeds, and a smooth wooden Malawian tritouch tool, used for lymphatic drainage. When I reach my room each night, it's ablaze with candles and stocked with calming oils and bath salts.

The experience is also meant to deepen your relationship to the bush, including with your trackers, who are deeply connected to this land. One morning we slowly follow the animal paths



A guided nature walk in South Africa's Kruger National Park

through the rust-colored rhyolite and granophyre boulders. It's midsummer—rainy season—and the landscape has been swallowed in green. It's also peak breeding season, so animals are everywhere, though harder to spot through the dense grass. Monika Malewski, my Shangaan guide, and David Maluleke, my tracker, explain the droppings, plants, and tracks we encounter. We collect indigenous sour plums for the afternoon's G&Ts and observe a tree whose powerful trunk has done the impossible: carved through a slab of rock. Malewski plucks the leathery leaf of a mother-in-law's tongue and uses a knife to fashion a sandal. The leaf, she says, can be made into a poultice that can help treat hemorrhoids. "Everything here has something to help us in life," she says. "We are walking over it, but we don't always know."

We reach a river, where I sit beneath an umbrella, lulled into another meditative state by singing bowls that create the same low frequency at which elephants vocalize. Rather than drown out the natural sounds, they enhance them, harmonizing with the kingfisher and turtledove nearby.

My time here culminates in an impromptu afternoon game drive to the border, where the N'wanetsi River meets the setting sun and the only sound is the call of a lone baboon. I feel as if my journey has reached a crescendo, the culmination of all the little nudges Singita has created. But I don't think too hard about it, because if I do, the moment might lose its magic.

» PLAN IT

Game drives, meals, and some drinks are all included at **Singita** camps. Certain wellness activities, including massages, may cost extra but can be booked ahead of your stay or when you arrive. *From $2,300 per person based on double occupancy; singita.com*

MORE WAYS TO **GO DEEPER**

» Hawaii

On weeklong journeys through the North Shore's forest reserves, **Legacy Travel**'s Hannah Cote partners with the Mālama Loko Ea Foundation to arrange cultural seminars and hands-on volunteer efforts as a way to help travelers to connect with Oahu. *From $4,000; legacytravel.com*

» Italy

Appreciate art on a new level with access to in-progress restorations of exhibits at small museums throughout Siena and Florence. Afterward, sip Tuscan wines with the vintners who created them. Simonetta Brandolini d'Adda, founder of **The Best in Italy,** can make it all happen. *Eight days from $10,000; thebestinitaly.com*

» Japan

Amy Tadehara of **Inside Japan Tours** suggests experiencing the country through the lens of its philosophical concepts. Examples include hadaka no tsukiai (the idea that naked communion bonds people together) at a ryokan on the Izu Peninsula and kuidaore (the pleasure of eating until you drop) with Kansai cooking in Osaka. *Fourteen days from $4,030; insidejapantours.com*

#05

Wildlife Spotting *in* BRITISH COLUMBIA

In northern Canada's Desolation Sound, Crai Bower discovers, salmon is everything

A family of grizzlies walk the shoreline of Desolation Sound, in remote British Columbia

WHEN THE SPIRIT BEAR APPEARED, I'd been tracking a black bear through the woods, so my heart was already racing. Cream-colored, with a russet wash on her nape and a prominent scar etched deeply above her snout, she began a languorous stroll along a fallen, moss-shrouded hemlock not far from where our small group was gathered. She stepped into the creek and grabbed a salmon, audibly crunching its bones, taking sustenance from what I'd soon come to understand is the basic unit of energy in this uniquely North American ecosystem. I had dreamed for decades of seeing a spirit bear—also known as a Kermode bear, a subspecies of black bear whose white fur is the result of a double-recessive gene—in the wild. I thought of what Marven Robinson, a Raven Clan member of the Gitga'at First Nation and owner of Gitga'at Spirit Tours, had told us. "Remember how you felt when you first saw a black bear, and remember how you feel when you see a white bear. Black bears intimidate, but white bears provide company."

I was traveling with 11 fellow guests on Maple Leaf Adventures' eight-day Great Bear Rainforest expedition, which explores the straits, bays, and coves of British Columbia's Inside Passage. We were being ferried aboard the six-cabin MV *Swell,* a converted 88-foot wood tugboat built in 1912. The Gitga'at First Nation has occupied this land for millennia, and each year Maple Leaf Adventures agrees to certain protocols in order to explore Gitga'at and other unceded tribal territory here in search of whales, grizzlies, and other wildlife.

When we entered Klekane Inlet, on the second day, a pod of seven humpback whales encircled

» PLAN IT

Maple Leaf Adventures' small ships take travelers on big trips to some of the most pristine places in Alaska and Canada. The Great Bear Rainforest expedition traverses the waterways of the world's largest temperate rain forest. *Eight days from $8,550 per person; mapleleafadventures.com*

PHOTOGRAPHS: ANDREW STRAIN, CRAI S BOWER

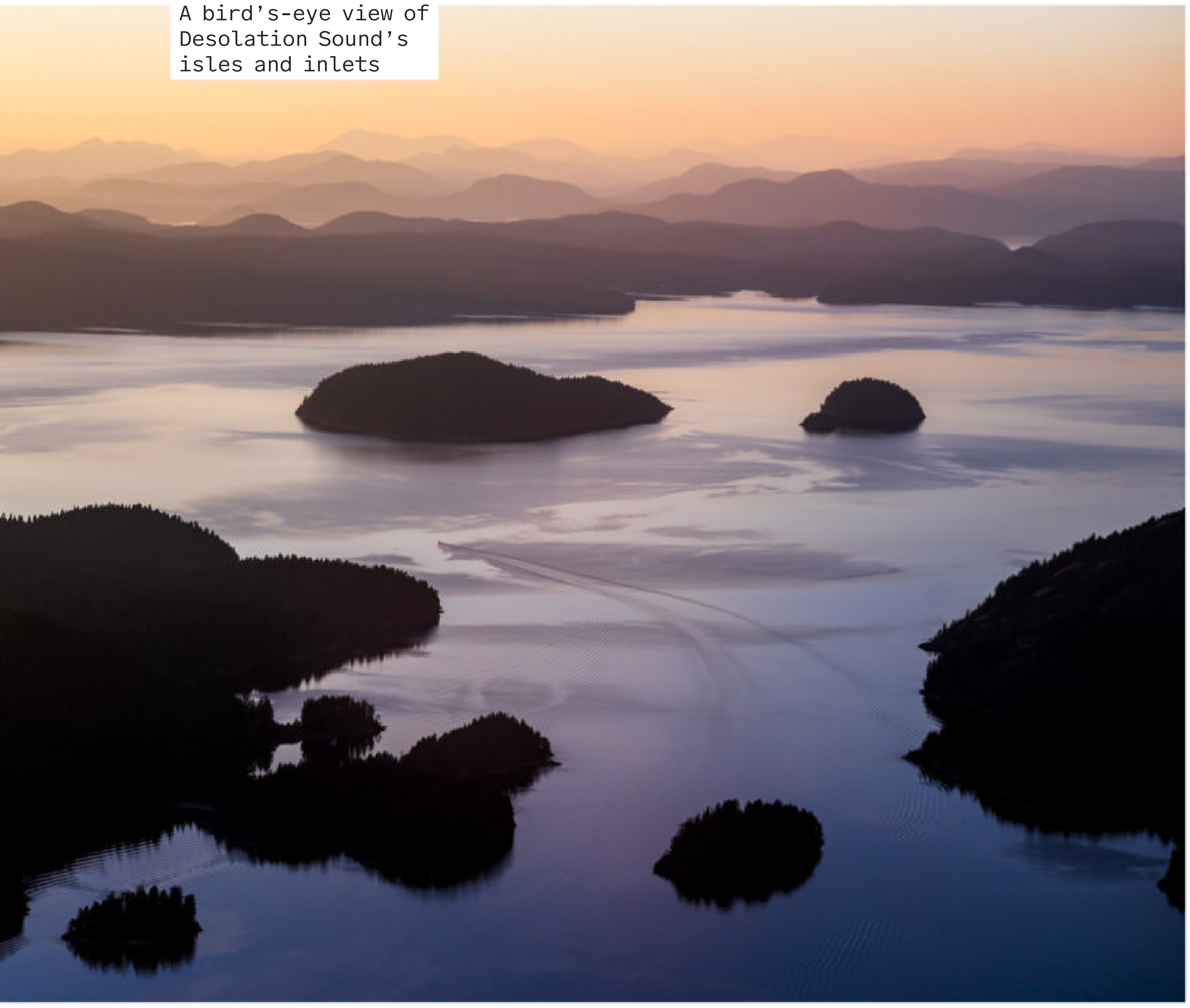
Kayaking in the Sound's clear, calm waters, with Mount Denman in the distance

The MV *Swell*, anchored in Khutze Inlet

our vessel, their exhalations casting rainbows in the air. In unison they flashed their flukes and descended deep beneath the surface to feed. Later that day, two Dall's porpoises surfed off the *Swell*'s bow like exuberant grand marshals.

The trip was just beginning, but it already felt as if we had struck the animal-spotting jackpot. Little did we know what was to come. In the Khutze Inlet, we shadowed a grizzly sow and her triplets ambling clumsily along an estuary where crab apple trees and huckleberry bushes, heavy with plump purple-red fruit, crowded the bank. One cub, with fuzzy Kahlúa-and-cream fur, plopped down in the water. The second scampered over fallen logs, while the third crawled around on the beach until the mother, ever vigilant for aggressive males in their vicinity, growled at them to keep pace.

That evening, I asked if we could make a return trip to the estuary to look for grizzlies. The naturalists onboard happily agreed, and very early the next morning, we loaded the →



A bird's-eye view of Desolation Sound's isles and inlets

Zodiac in the dark. At one point, we were so close to a female bear as she swam that her wake rocked our boat. The fog-cloaked morning light provided a cinematic backdrop as she pressed her salmon breakfast against a rock and used her three-inch claws to pick the flesh from the bone.

"All life here originates with salmon," our naturalist Marlo Shaw told us as we slowly motored through the stubborn fog back to the *Swell* for breakfast. "Not only are they the bears' primary diet, but their decaying carcasses also provide up to 70 percent of the nitrogen for the surrounding riparian zone." As if to emphasize Marlo's point, an immature bald eagle called plaintively from the top of a nearby tree. Over the course of the week we spent here, we would see droves of eagles dining on salmon.

Humpbacks and fin whales migrate through these waters biannually, but no animal, not even the grizzly, rivals the orca as a symbol of the Pacific Northwest. So it was a thrill when, on our last afternoon as we motored into Drumlummon Bay, Captain Matt Whelan announced that he'd spotted the resident northern orca pod less than a mile off our bow. We approached and watched about 15 of them for more than an hour. A few younger orcas hunted near the shore, spy-hopping—positioning themselves vertically in the water and looking around to see what was going on, almost like treading water—and breaching with majestic midair flips. A large male, his dorsal fin as long as a human being, frolicked with two females.

That evening, over a dinner of Dungeness crab cakes and excellent local Cabernet Sauvignon, my fellow passengers grew emotional as they recalled all the ways they'd gotten to dive into nature over the previous week. My thoughts returned to that solitary white bear, and how lucky I'd been to find myself in her company.

MORE **ANIMAL** ENCOUNTERS

» Galápagos Islands

There is no better place on Earth for scuba diving with whale sharks than the Galápagos, according to Louisa Fisher. The **Reefscape Travel** specialist described an encounter she recently had in Darwin as the single best marine-life experience she's ever had in 22 years of diving. *Eight days from $8,350; reefscapetravel.com*

» Rwanda

A private tour is necessary to see the endangered mountain gorillas who live in Volcanoes National Park. Ralph Iantosca of **Iantosca Travel** goes one step further and offers a behind-the-scenes look at some sustainability projects under way in the park—one of which is expanding the habitat for the local gorilla population, which, happily, is now growing. *Four days from $8,250; iantoscatravel.com*

» Montana

The reintroduction of gray wolves to Yellowstone is one of the great success stories of wildlife conservation. **All Roads North** founder Sam Highley recommends viewing them in winter, when they can easily be spotted against the snow and are actively hunting as they prepare to breed. *Seven days from $5,000; allroadsnorth.com*

PHOTOGRAPH: ANDREW STRAIN

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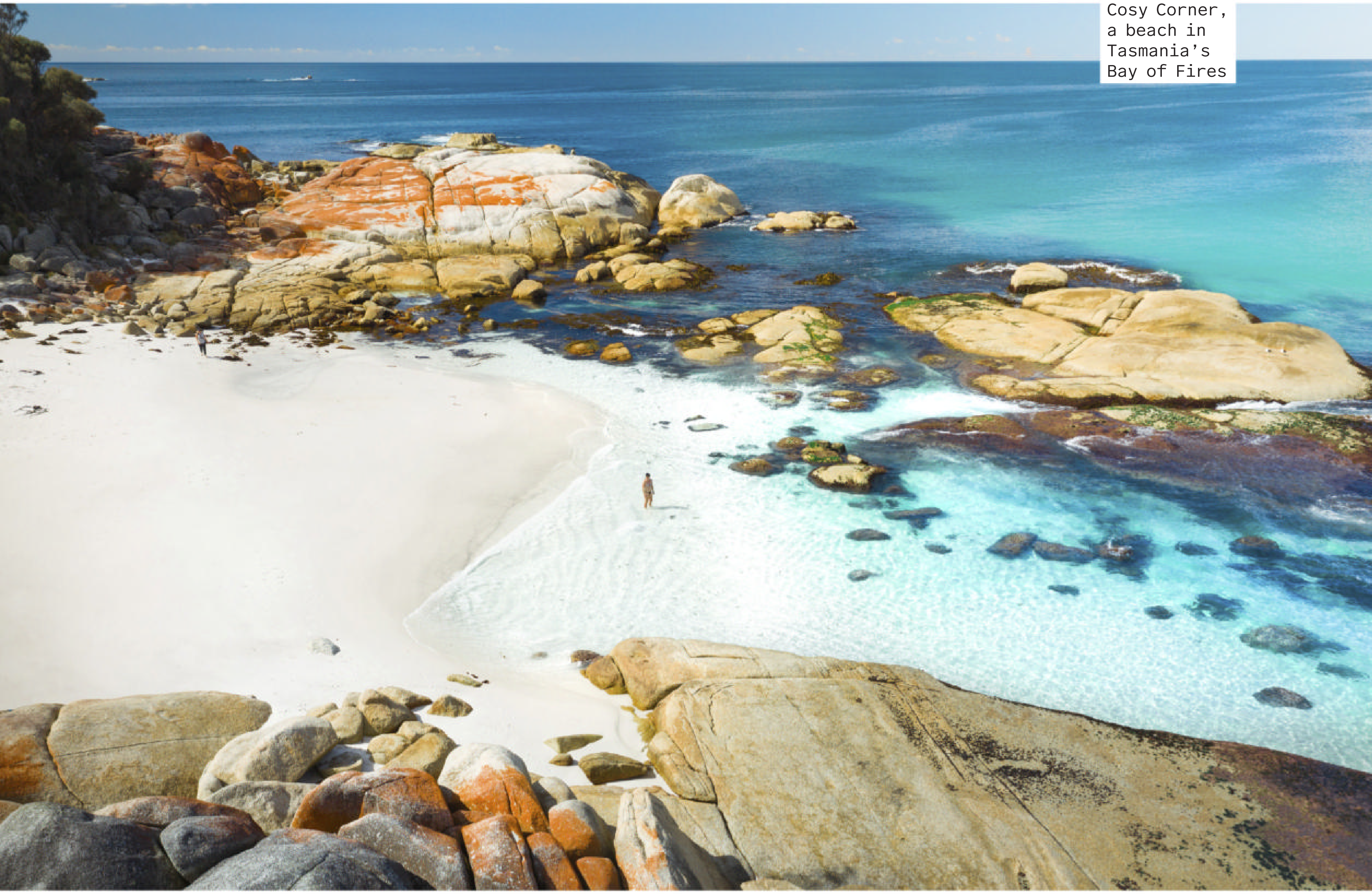

Cosy Corner, a beach in Tasmania's Bay of Fires

#06

Bushwalking *in* TASMANIA

On a trek along the Australian state's scenic coast, Jayme Moye discovers how connecting with nature can help protect it

IT'S NOVEMBER, SPRINGTIME IN AUSTRALIA, and day one of my first bushwalk, a 20-mile journey that will trace the island state of Tasmania's remote Bay of Fires. Bushwalking is a national pastime in Tassie, more than half of which is protected in national parks, public and private reserves, and UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Locals here love experiencing the backcountry by foot, preferably over the course of several days, walking up to eight hours at a time between lodges and campsites built expressly for this purpose. The walk I'm on is arguably the most visually spectacular of the state's many beloved treks, with white-sand beaches and orange-lichen-cloaked rocks that contrast with the omnipresent turquoise sea.

Brandon Hill, a guide and naturalist, leads our small group along a hard-packed sand single track through the coastal heathlands. Knee-high ferns, shrubs, and flowering kangaroo tail grass dominate the landscape. A raucous birdcall stops us. Hill gestures toward a stand of banksia trees where a flock of magnificently crested yellow-tailed black cockatoos have begun launching themselves into the sky. We wait and watch until the very last one disappears over the horizon. I understand then that bushwalking is, at its core, about connecting with nature. Unlike the treks I'd been on

PHOTOGRAPHS: OLLY GASPAR, ADAM GIBSON

in the past, this one feels more like a moving meditation than a test of endurance.

It's also the backbone of a new citizen science initiative to collect the seeds of at-risk plant species in Tasmania's national parks. In February 2021, the tour operator Tasmanian Walking Company, in partnership with the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Garden, offered a first-of-its-kind seed-collecting bushwalk: six days in the heart of Cradle Mountain–Lake St. Clair National Park, deep in Tasmania's alpine interior. Under the tutelage of James Wood, a renowned botanist and the head of the Tasmanian Seed Conservation Centre, participants discovered a species of willow herb that had never before been found that far north. They also collected 270,000 seeds from a flowering shrub that is endemic to Tasmania but difficult to collect due to its remote habitat, high in the mountains. Wood added the bounty to the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Garden's inventory.

The living room of the Holland House, a rental with views of the Bay of Fires

Seed banking—a global effort to prevent species extinction in the wild—is more important than ever in Australia, where bushfires have become bigger, more frequent, and more destructive because of climate change. At the same time, sending teams of botanists to off-the-grid locations in the wilderness to gather the hundreds of thousands of specimens required for a successful collection is difficult, time-consuming, and costly. Partnering with bushwalkers to collect them is an elegant solution—and a popular one: Tasmanian Walking Company's inaugural trip sold out almost immediately. The outfitter has since added seed-collecting walks with Wood to its lineup, each summer at a different national park, as well as other botany-focused bushwalks, like the one I'm on, each spring.

Over breakfast the next morning, Hill tells us about a beautiful shrub, *Ricinocarpos pinifolius,* commonly known as wedding bush, that we have yet to spot. After about five hours of walking, he points out where we're headed: a lush hillside leading up to the Bay of Fires Lodge, where we'll spend the night. As we get closer, I notice the steep terrain isn't covered in the usual shades of green. Instead, it's blanketed in white blossoms. Hill confirms: It's the elusive wedding bush, and we've caught it at the apex of its bloom. The trail takes us straight into the fragrant, shoulder-high shrubs. Come summer, when the Tasman Sea is warm enough to swim in and the wedding bush's daisylike flowers have matured into fruit, Wood will return with a fresh crew to collect the spherical seed capsules. But right now we're the only ones here, aside from a juvenile pademelon—a smaller, furrier cousin of the kangaroo—and its mother. So we linger, soaking up the sweet scent.

» PLAN IT

Great Walks of Australia offers guided walks throughout the country, including the Seven Peaks Walk on Lord Howe Island in New South Wales and the Murray River Walk in South Australia as well as the Bay of Fires Lodge Walk featured in this story. *From $1,845; greatwalksofaustralia.com.au*

MORE **WALKS** IN THE WILD

» Canada

Nova Scotia's Cape Breton Island is a boon for hikers of all abilities. Jackie Poppe, cofounder of **East of 80,** says the region remains accessible all year-round, and winter hikes are breathtaking for those willing to bundle up. Exclusive accommodations, reached only by snowshoe or snowmobile, can be arranged. *Three days from $2,000; eastof80.ca*

» Slovenia

Matej Knific of **Luxury Slovenia** recommends a multiday walk on the Juliana Trail in Triglav National Park for picturesque landscapes. It's also possible to reach the Med from the Alps in less than two hours, meaning you can hike in the mountains and swim in the sea on the same day. *Guided hikes from $500; luxuryslovenia.eu*

» Bhutan

According to **Guides of Bhutan** founder Philip Bowen, a day trek following a pilgrimage to the iconic Tiger's Nest Monastery can be a life-changing experience. Trekkers leave offerings and receive blessings at Buddhist temples dotted along the mountainsides. *From $350; guidesofbhutan.com*

Rebecca Webster, co-owner of Ukwakhwa, at home in Wisconsin

Dehydrated sunflowers in Ukwakhwa's sunroom

Variously colored dried corn at Ukwakhwa

PHOTOGRAPHS: KEVIN SERNA

#07

Harvesting *in* WISCONSIN

On an Oneida homestead, Ashlea Halpern experiences Native culinary traditions

“EVERY TIME AN INDIGENOUS PERSON plants a seed, that is an act of resistance, an assertion of sovereignty, and a reclamation of identity,” Rebecca Webster tells me as she shimmies her spoon between rows of kernels in shades of lilac, plum, and bone. When hulled correctly, the corn makes a satisfying *pop! pop! pop!* sound like Orville Redenbacher’s. I’m new to this, though, so my kernels go flying all over her kitchen—to the delight of Rebecca’s three rambunctious dogs. Her husband, Steve, is armed with a small metal thresher that strips the cobs in seconds flat. “He’s just showing off,” she says, rolling her eyes.

The Websters are citizens of the Oneida Nation. They recently transformed their 10-acre homestead on the Oneida Reservation near Green Bay, Wisconsin, into a nonprofit. In addition to growing several varieties of heirloom Haudenosaunee corn, beans, and squash (collectively known as the three sisters), as well as sunflowers, sunchokes, and tobacco, they’re on a mission to turn their farm, Ukwakhwa: Tsinu Niyukwayay^thoslu (the name means “Our foods: where we plant things”), into a place where Oneida community members and nontribal people gather to learn the ins and outs of planting, growing, and harvesting Native foods.

The project has been a long time coming. When the Websters acquired this land, in 2017, the soil was in bad shape and littered with plastic barrels and thousands of old tires. Over the next six years, they restored three acres of forest and turned another acre into a pollinator habitat. They built a beautiful house from scratch, reinforcing the basement ceiling so it could handle the weight of the braids of corn above. Most important, they planted seeds.

Corn is central not just to Ukwakhwa’s mission but to Oneida life. The first thing the tribe did when it arrived in Wisconsin, after being forcibly removed from New York in the early 1800s, was clear land and plant seeds. “Through all of our trauma—boarding schools, removal, assimilation—corn has remained by our side and been an integral part of our ceremonial and daily life,” Rebecca says. “But there’s a lot of embarrassment and shame when Indigenous people don’t know how to grow food or speak their native language. They don’t know because they weren’t taught, because their parents weren’t taught. We want to create a safe space for people to learn this stuff.”

Neither Steve nor Rebecca grew up in farming families, but they loved eating Native foods and wanted to eat them more often. Rebecca, who spent 13 years working as an attorney for the Oneida Nation, switched her attention to agriculture, writing (her latest book, *Our Precious Corn: Yukwanénste,* is due out this spring), and teaching (she’s an assistant professor in the American Indian studies department at the University of Minnesota Duluth). Steve quit his all-consuming job as the reservation’s records director to homeschool the couple’s two daughters and get Ukwakhwa up and running.

Once the shelling is done, we begin the tedious process of seed selection. The plumpest kernels are reserved for planting at the

→

A breakfast bowl of Oneida cornmeal mush

next harvest; all the others go into the bucket for soup and bread. I roll each one around in the palm of my hand, studying its shape and texture. Rebecca reminds me that every kernel has its role: Some are responsible for growing into new plants; others feed family and community. I've never thought this much about corn in my life, which is precisely the point.

Ukwakhwa is open to nontribal people because the Websters believe it's important to have good allies. While some community members are understandably skeptical of outsiders' intentions and prefer to keep their skills and beliefs to themselves, Rebecca would rather "control the narrative." That's why she and Steve launched a YouTube channel in early 2020 covering everything from seed saving to braiding corn-husk flowers: to share their hard-won knowledge with as many people as possible.

» PLAN IT

Ukwakhwa: Tsinu Niyukwayay^thoslu is located on the Oneida Reservation. While you're there, support additional Oneida businesses, including the Oneida Longhouse, a replica of a traditional Oneida home. *Details and pricing for visits at ukwakhwa.com*

We take a break from seed sorting to make corn-husk dolls (Rebecca's is lean and regal, mine stout and lopsided) and boil a batch of sweet corn kanastohale, a kind of dumpling made with corn flour, berries, and maple syrup. Traditional cooking and crafts are taught at Ukwakhwa, which can now accommodate larger groups thanks to a gleaming commercial kitchen. The commissary abuts a new trading post, where the scent of freshly stained wood lingers in the air, and the shelves are stacked with Tuscarora white corn, speckled beans, blue vervain tea, maitake-laced tinctures, and handwoven baskets. Everything looks incredible, but nothing is for sale. Instead, community members are encouraged to barter their time and skills for goods and services. The Websters have traded corn for elk meat, venison chili, haircuts, honey, singing lessons, foraged medicines, even a vintage Castle Grayskull from Masters of the Universe. (Steve was on a nostalgia trip.)

Future plans for Ukwakhwa include adding a rainwater-catchment system, opening guest cabins, and even launching a rez-centric food business. "You've heard the term *food desert* before, but we live in a food swamp," says Steve. His dream is to get nutritious, affordable, locally grown, home-cooked meals to community members with the speed and efficiency of Uber Eats. "What if you could order something made with local wild rice or white corn grown by us? Our next phase is about getting our ingredients right to the people."

MORE **INDIGENOUS** EXPERIENCES

» Australia

To gain a better understanding of Aboriginal culture, Lynette Wilson recommends visiting the Northern Territory. The **Destination World** founder has developed special relationships with Wugularr guides, opening up an otherwise inaccessible area for clients. *Six days from $4,100; destinationworld.com*

» French Polynesia

The island of Raiatea is considered one of the cradles of civilization, a place to which various Oceania peoples—including the Māori of New Zealand and the Kānaka Maoli of Hawaii—trace their ancestry. Samantha Collum of **River Oaks Travel Agency** can arrange visits with local families who will share their legends and history. *Seven days from $7,500; riveroakstravelagency.com*

» Namibia

Clients of Nina Patel, founder of **Vacations That Matter,** can get one-on-one access to tribal elders, who will discuss cultural traditions and the impact of colonialism, tourism, and climate change on their lives. *From $800 per person per night; vacationsthatmatter.com*

PHOTOGRAPH: KEVIN SERNA

Condé Nast Traveler

PROMOTION

POST

2023

NEWS, UPDATES, AND EVENTS
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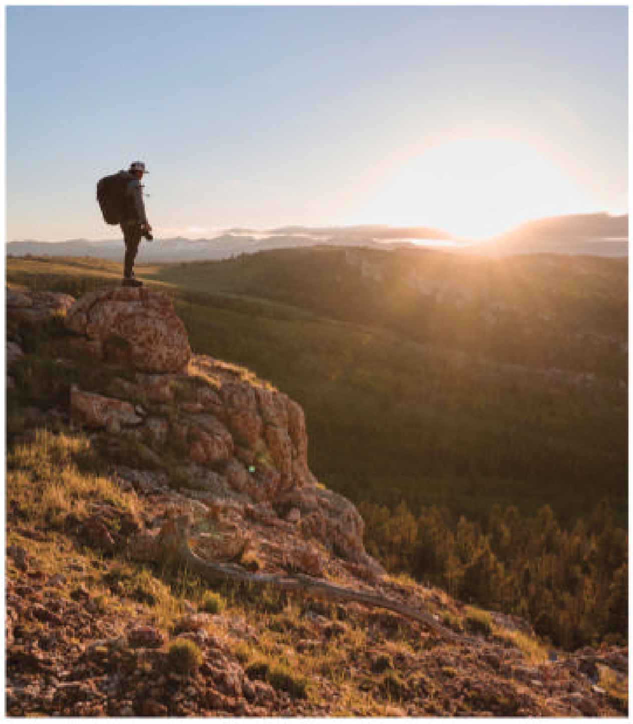
CONDÉ NAST TRAVELER



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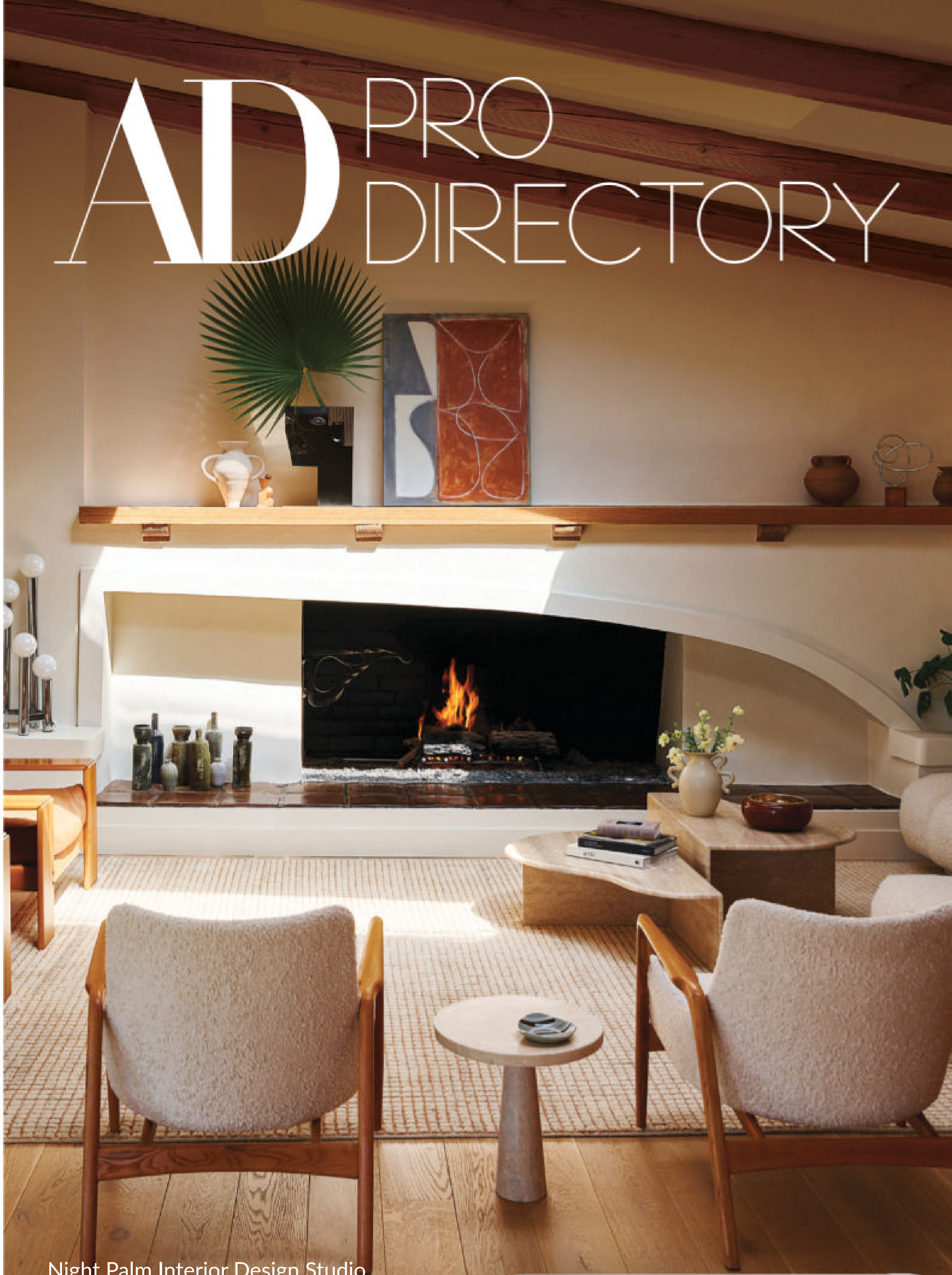

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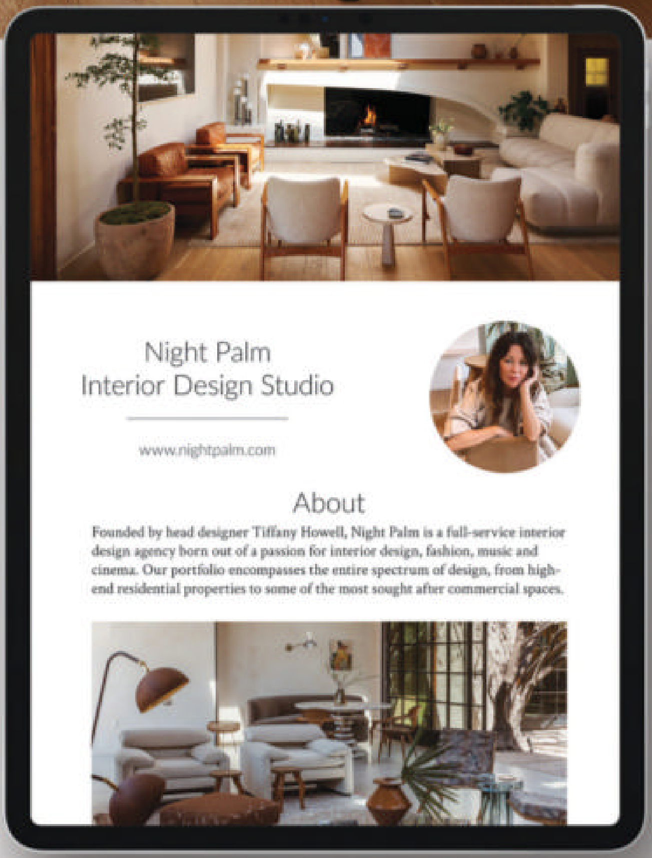

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About

Founded by head designer Tiffany Howell, Night Palm is a full-service interior design agency born out of a passion for interior design, fashion, music and cinema. Our portfolio encompasses the entire spectrum of design, from high-end residential properties to some of the most sought after commercial spaces.

A dive boat anchored off the shore near Kralendijk, Bonaire's capital

#08

Birding *in* BONAIRE

On a Caribbean island famed for its underwater riches, Betsy Andrews looks skyward

PEANUT AND POPJE ARE IN LOVE. They hooked up at a rehab facility on the Dutch Caribbean island of Bonaire. Popje has lingering issues, but Peanut was discharged. Then Peanut returned, insisting he be let back in. Withdrawn and not eating in Peanut's absence, Popje sprang to life. Now Peanut comes and goes, bringing food for Popje, the weight of her happiness on his shoulders.

I should say on his *yellow* shoulders, because Peanut and Popje are yellow-shouldered parrots. Echo, the conservation center where they met, protects their threatened species and its habitat, Bonaire's tropical dry forest. Feeding melon to these emerald-and-gold beauties was one delight of my trip to Bonaire. Another was earning bragging rights: According to eBird, the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's crowdsourced database, I am among the top birders on Bonaire. Located along the flyway from South America, the island is a stopover for 20,000 shorebirds and a breeding ground for American flamingos; in short, it's a birding wonderland. Even in summer, the birding off-season, I encountered 64 of the 245 species that have ever been recorded here.

Most visitors come for the sea life. Encircled by a marine reserve, Bonaire is a scuba hot spot. I pitched in on a reef-renewal dive, scrubbing algae off PVC hung with regenerating coral fragments. But a healthy reef isn't just for fish; it's important to the birds that eat fish and live in habitats sheltered by the reef. The island is so critical that it will soon host one of the Caribbean's few Motus Wildlife Tracking System towers, a radio signal station that reads the teeny transmitters on tagged birds. It's part of a global tracking system that keeps tabs on our feathery pals.

When I wasn't diving, all I needed were binoculars and a knowledgeable guide. Bonaire Bird Photography Tours' Susan Davis used to own a dive shop. "But as you get older, flinging tanks around gets harder," she told me as we climbed into an SUV for a tour of Washington Slagbaai National Park.

Covering 14,000 acres of two former plantations in the island's northwest, the park is ringed by cliffs and beaches with a desertlike interior. We passed donkeys, progeny of animals left by the Spaniards who cleared the hardwoods in the 15th century. The place felt foreboding—yet birds were everywhere. Brown-throated parakeets flew from

PHOTOGRAPHS: ATSUKO ELLIE TERAMOTO, STEVE SCHNOLL

Endemic royal terns make off with a freshly caught big-eyed scad

a termite mound where they were perched, their chattering sounding like their name in Papiamento, the local dialect: prikichi. A crested caracara, a falcon with an orange face and a black mullet that rises into a mohawk when it's emotional, rode a windblown shrub like it was a bucking bronco.

At Pos Mangel, a spring-fed water hole, we observed the pecking order: Tiny common ground doves were displaced from their perch by white-tipped doves, who got booted by scaly-naped pigeons, their burgundy neck feathers ribbed like car grills. We traversed an ancient lava field to peer over the cliff at magnificent frigate birds soaring on six feet of wingspan. "Frigate birds have lost leg mass evolutionarily," explained Davis. "They can't walk or swim with puny legs, so they steal from other birds instead of hunting."

The next morning, Davis took me to the flamingo breeding grounds on the island's southern salt pans. After the Spanish, the Dutch captured the island, seeking salt to preserve herring. Dotting the shore were centuries-old stone huts that provided shade to enslaved Africans forced to harvest salt. Nearby, male and female least terns traded off sitting on small depressions in the ground where they were discreetly incubating their eggs.

Across the road sprawled the salt pans, some white with crystals and some pink. On the horizon, hundreds of flamingos sheltered from the wind in the bird sanctuary.

On my final day, Davis took me to an offbeat hiking location: a collection of ponds containing the filtered output of Bonaire's wastewater-treatment plant that were packed with birds. Beside the fenced-in plant, black-bellied whistling ducks rummaged for insects in a pool while a groove-billed ani scratched in the dirt nearby. Davis has petitioned for the area's protection, and I'm cheering her on. Zoned for industrial use, this gritty spot next to Bonaire's prison might not be on every tourist's itinerary, but it's a highlight for birders like me—because it's a paradise for the birds.

» PLAN IT

Dawn Oliver, founder of **Well Xplored,** can arrange a similar eight-day trip that includes dives to explore Bonaire's many coral reefs and shipwrecks, with binoculars and a birding guide at the ready for when you come up for air. *From $3,500; wellxplored.com*

MORE **AVIAN** PARADISES

» New Zealand

Before humans arrived on these islands, they were predator-free, which is why so many of the birds here can't fly. Donna Thomas of **New Zealand Travel** showcases the many strange species with trips that can include excursions to spot the nocturnal kiwi bird or after-hours access to a yellow-eyed-penguin preserve. *Fourteen days from $8,500; newzealandtravel.org*

» Iceland

This Nordic nation has been a stop on annual migratory paths for millennia. Chris Gordon, founder of **Icepedition,** has access to privately owned land where different bird species build nests on the ground. Guests will see dozens of varieties clustered together. *Day trips from $750; icepedition.com*

» Brazil

To spot the best fliers in the country, **South American Escapes** founder Jill Siegel recommends 16 days accompanied by a birding expert. The Pantanal has over 400 species and the Atlantic Forest region more than 930—about 15 percent of which are found nowhere else. *From $20,000; southamericanescapes.com*

layer upon layer

In the foothills of the Himalayas, a proud new generation is drawing attention to Ladakh's rich and diverse culinary legacy while putting a fresh spin on tradition

By Smitha Menon Photographs by Tom Parker

Prayer flags in Leh,
the rugged capital
of the Ladakh region

From left: Colorful vegetarian dishes at Tsas by Dolkhar, in Leh; monks at Thiksey Monastery, just outside of Leh; Prince Stanzin Namgyal with a platter of khura, a type of fried biscuit; the bright interiors of Stok Palace Heritage Hotel in Leh, the summer home of the Namgyal family

In Ladakh, everything revolves around the kitchen hearth, or thap—even time. Many older Ladakhi homes have an opening that lets the first rays of sun fall directly onto these earthen stoves, not only warming them before the cooking begins but also turning them into sundials. As day becomes night, the light shifts, capturing the dance of smoke in the air while the thap casts shadows that tell the time.

In Nilza Wangmo's kitchen, in the monastic mountain village of Alchi, it's just past one o'clock, and the light has moved off the center of the thap. Long silken strands of noodles fall gently from her flour-coated palms into a bowl. "When I cook, I feel as if my mother is with me," says the soft-spoken 43-year-old. It was her mother who taught her to cook timsthuk, an earthy noodle soup brightened by Ladakhi peas, dried cheese, and wild chives. Now it is one of the star dishes at Alchi Kitchen, the eatery Wangmo set up

above her home in 2016. Guests sit around the thap as her team turns out steamed momos, or small dumplings, and chutagi, a thick soup with local pasta and mountain vegetables.

Wangmo is part of a modern movement to shine a light on Ladakhi food—a cuisine as rich and complex as everything else in this northern corner of India. Until recently, gyuma, Ladakh's famous hearty blood sausages, and other regional specialties, like stinging nettle soups and nourishing stews, rarely made it beyond the region's complicated mountain borders, which include the Kashmir Valley to the west, Pakistan-administered Gilgit-Baltistan to the north, and Chinese-controlled Tibet and Xinjiang to the east. But a new group of foodies has begun spreading the word. Wangmo herself has hosted pop-ups in New Delhi and Mumbai, while well-respected Mumbai chefs such as Prateek Sadhu and Vanika Choudhary are paying homage to the area through dining experiences and cookbooks. Launched by enterprising young locals, new brands such as Ladakh Basket and Nima Goos Goos have been instrumental in introducing the rest of the country to indigenous ingredients like sea buckthorn and buckwheat, and making them accessible to those outside of India as well.

Ladakh's proud patchwork culture includes the legacy of Buddhist pilgrims, Tibetan refugees, Islamic rulers, Sikh dynasts, and Central Asian Silk Road traders. While much of the region feels Tibetan—its epic mountainscapes are dotted with whitewashed chorten shrines and hilltop monasteries—Muslims make up a sizable part of the population in areas such as Hunder and Kargil. Today's borders, often arbitrary lines that have brutally divided families and cultures, are disputed by the looming powers of India, Pakistan, and China. But as I find out during an eye-opening week here, food is a way to make sense of it all: a tangible symbol of identity, peaceful defiance, and hope.

In the regional capital of Leh, a popular base for visiting mountaineers, I meet many people who are using these dishes as a tool for cultural dialogue—young, returning Ladakhis in particular. They include Padma Yangchen and Jigmet Diskit, friends whose fashion label Namza Couture, which is rooted in traditional Ladakhi artisanship, has shown at London Fashion Week. In 2016, the pair opened the restaurant Namza Dining to celebrate regional dishes such as Yarkandi pulao, a buttery rice dish of slow-cooked mutton made with cumin imported centuries ago by Silk Road traders. Two years later, Ladakh hotelier Rigzin Namgyal launched Syah, a fine-dining restaurant that inventively repurposes area staples: apricot churned to silky ice cream, for one, and barley doughnuts served with decadent toffee dipping sauce.

One especially memorable meal takes place at Stok Palace Heritage Hotel, a fortresslike castle on a hill overlooking the city. Bending to enter through the low door, a sign of respect to the thap, I take in the gleaming, intricately carved ladles and pots that line the walls. Kunzes Angmo emerges amid billows of steam that rise from bubbling cauldrons. The 37-year-old runs Artisanal Alchemy, a company that curates three-hour-long feasts she passionately describes as “my history on your plate.”

With us is her cousin, Prince Stanzin Namgyal, whose forebears ruled Ladakh between 1460 and 1842, building Stok Palace as their summer home in 1820 before their dynasty fell to the Sikh Empire. He recently returned from studying at the Cordon Bleu Institute in Paris to open Willow Café at the palace—a European bistro inspired by Ladakhi cooking practices. The table is laden with local specialties: zathuk, a version of Tibetan thukpa soup made with stinging nettles; khambir, a smoky sourdough that’s baked on an open fire; and drapu, O-shaped dumplings resting atop apricot-kernel sauce. “So much of our food history is passed down orally, so it’s been lost through the generations,” says Kunzes, who has spent years researching Ladakhi dishes and cooking techniques. “It’s ridiculous that tourists come to Ladakh and eat butter chicken and Maggi.” Every ingredient relays a story of harsh landscapes and colliding cultures. I taste yak meat that’s been sun-dried by the nomads of Changthang to get them through merciless six-month winters on the Chinese border in the high east; stewed apricots from the lush valleys of Sham, near Kashmir, as well as from Baltistan, where Muslim farmers grow these juicy delights alongside mulberries and peaches.

The mood at the table is optimistic but cautious. Ladakh’s status shift in 2019, from a region in Jammu and Kashmir to a Union Territory directly under India’s central government, opened it to both the opportunities and the threats of tourism. “We don’t want this to become another Manali,” says Kunzes’s sister Tsezin Angmo, referring to the crowded hill town in Himachal Pradesh, the region south of Ladakh where backpackers and honeymooners jostle for a slice of Himalayan paradise. In the narrow streets of old Leh town, there is still a prevailing peacefulness, which I feel most acutely at the Namgyal Tsemo Monastery, above the city, where the only sound is the gentle fluttering of prayer flags in the breeze.

Yet the new Ladakhi food movement is reaching far beyond Leh. I arrive in Turtuk after a six-hour drive along the Khardung La, one of the world’s highest road passes, with its sabertooth peaks and quirky road signs. (“Life begins outside your comfort zone!”) A tiny village wedged between the Karakoram Range and the Himalayas, Turtuk was part of Pakistan until 1971, when the Indian army

↘ where to stay

Stok Palace Heritage Hotel, Leh
Raja Jigmed Wangchuk Namgyal and his family still live at this former palace, where six frescoed suites have been restored for guest stays. It's also possible to book at Chulli Bagh—three minimalist cottages set among apricot trees—and dine at Prince Stanzin's Willow Café, which uses kitchen-garden produce. *Doubles from about $188; stokpalaceheritage.com*

Jade House, Leh
At this four-bedroom homestay, sisters Tsezin and Kunzes Angmo organize everything from heritage walks through Leh's old town to three-hour-long tasting menus. Artisanal Alchemy, Kunzes's dining experience, can be hosted at Jade House or Stok Palace, from about $62 for two. *Doubles from about $67; +91 99581 11003*

Ladakh Sarai, Saboo
In the shadows of the Stok Kangri range, a 10-minute ride from Leh, this expansive retreat has plush beds and balconies to take in the views. Inspired by old caravansaries, it's a space where travelers swap stories round the bonfire. *Doubles from about $122; ladakhsarai.com*

Kyagar, Sumur
Comprised of solar-powered cottages overlooking the snowcapped peaks of the Nubra Valley, this new hotel is situated on what was once the Silk Road. Owners Rinchen Kalon and her husband, Stanzin Gurmet, honor their ancestral land by serving local specialties like khambir, a kind of sourdough; and tingmo, a take on steamed buns, served with spicy pork fry. *Doubles from about $176; thekyagar.com*

Turtuk Holiday Resort, Turtuk
After a long ride through the Nubra Valley, the peach trees and marigolds here feels like a dream. The modest tented rooms are the best accommodation in the region, and the Balti Farm dining experience is sublime. *Doubles from about $146; +91 99069 93123*

Left: The imposing Tibetan Buddhist Thiksey Monastery sits on a hill overlooking the Indus Valley

↘ where to eat

Namza Dining, Leh
In a farmhouse-style space, this relaxed eatery celebrates classic recipes, including drapu dumplings with ground walnuts, apricot kernels, and spices, and local ingredients, many from its own farm. *About $67 for two; namzadining.com*

Syah, Leh
This elegant farm-to-table restaurant serves the region's most creative take on Ladakhi food. Chef Pankaj Sharma buries vegetables as part of an ancient preservation technique and brews soup in a coffee siphon. *About $27 for two; +91 95824 31762*

Tsas by Dolkhar, Leh
After a stint in New Delhi, Rigzin Lachic returned to her native Ladakh to launch this cool plant-based restaurant in early 2022, giving tradition a modern twist in dishes such as sea buckthorn semifreddo with berry and aquafaba shards. *About $30 for two; dolkharladakh.com*

Alchi Kitchen, Alchi
At Nilza Wangmo's restaurant outside a 1,000-year-old monasterial complex, the thap itself has almost become a place of worship. The menu changes daily, with a welcoming team serving regional dishes. *About $15 for two; +91 99063 48635*

captured it during a border skirmish. The aroma of wild mint fills the air; close by, the Shyok River babbles demurely on its journey from Tibet through India and on to Pakistan.

At the Turtuk Holiday Resort, where I stay that night, owner Rashidullah Khan catches me gazing at the dandelion puffballs that dance in the breeze. "Locals say that they can carry one's thoughts and dreams to loved ones over the border," he notes wistfully. After four years of working in Japan, Khan returned to Turtuk in 2016 to launch the Balti Farm experience, a farm-to-table tasting menu that showcases the cuisine of Baltistan—an erstwhile kingdom stretching across 29,000 square miles, now divided between India and Pakistan, whose borders are just a few miles away.

Unlike the meals in Leh, our Balti feast is full of fresh herbs and vegetables, the result of the area's more temperate low-altitude climate. There's ba-leh, noodles served in a stew of potato, peas, and wild herbs, and chonmagramgrim, a bright-as-summer garden salad of tomatoes, apples, walnuts, apricot kernels, cucumber, and dried cheese. "There are only 3,000 of us on this side of the fence," says Khan. "Baltistan was a small kingdom, and our history doesn't feature in any textbooks. If we don't tell our stories, who will?"

His words come back to me when we visit the old summer palace of the Yabgo dynasty, Baltistan's former rulers. Inside the ruins of the heartbreakingly beautiful mansion, we meet the aging king Yabgo Mohammad Khan Kacho, who points with his curved staff to the snowcapped mountains in the distance. "Just beyond that mountain is the rest of my family. I'm in touch with them, but I cannot visit.

From left: A guest suite at Stok Palace Heritage Hotel; a local girl in Turtuk, one of India's northernmost villages; timsthuk, a Ladakhi noodle soup, at Alchi Kitchen

India, Pakistan, the British—they don't realize that we're all the same. We all experience joy, sadness, and heartbreak. Everything else is politics."

From Turtuk, we drive along the Nubra Valley, passing military transit camps and border villages. It is a dizzying landscape of sheer cliffs, dried-up riverbeds, and wind-ravaged mountains that resemble the claws of some ancient predatory creature. I'm grateful for my skilled driver, Mehdi, a local villager. When I ask him how he feels about the task at hand, his reply sums up life here: "It is as beautiful as it is risky. In a flash, everything can change."

For now, though, hope is overriding caution. I feel it in Sumur, a region three and a half hours north of Leh where rising sand dunes carpet a vast valley. The new Kyagar boutique hotel has brought a sleek elegance to this area of wild beauty, where more and more visitors are riding the same double-humped Bactrian camels that once trudged the Silk Road. I eat in the home of the village head, Rigzin Wangdus, who, with his wife, Tsewang Spaldon, has cooked up a Ladakhi feast. Wangdus has taken it upon himself to put his small town on the tourist map: He just opened its first bakery, supplying pastries to nearby hotels. As we sit down, he shows us a local guidebook he put together—the first of its kind in English, he says.

From their thap comes skyu, a one-bowl meal of handmade orecchiette-like pasta in a milk sauce, and soupy mok mok, a chunky Ladakhi take on Tibetan dumplings stuffed with spiced minced lamb; paba, chubby barley and wheat flatbreads; and tsamik, a yogurt dip embellished with radish leaves and dried herbs.

Previously, they only offered rooms to stay, but the pair recently opened up their home kitchen to serve meals as well. "Without our food, we felt we weren't giving tourists a complete experience of the place. If they really want to know about our lives, they have to eat with us," says Wangdus, pointing out the apple, walnut, and wild jasmine trees in his garden. They aren't fruiting yet—it's May, and parts of the valley are still frozen—but they'll be ripe for the picking when tourist season begins, in late June. Back in Leh, on our last morning, we head up to Thiksey Monastery to catch the daybreak prayers. As the sun rises from behind the mountains, horns bellow and young monks begin to chant. The atmosphere is electric as the priests pray for all the lost souls, for good to triumph over evil. As the chorus winds down, monks in training pour butter tea and hand out soft buns. I say a small invocation, dip my bun into the warming tea, and realize to my surprise that my cheeks, like those of others around me, are wet with tears.

Drying my face, I spy, in a corner of the quiet hall, a young monk licking the last bits of gooey bread and butter from his bowl. He flashes me a sheepish smile before returning to his prayers. I realize then that everyone in this old land at the crossroads of a new era—locals, tourists, and anyone touched by Ladakh's light—is hungry. They're seeking salvation, success, and most important, a story to make sense of something deep within. But Ladakhis, perhaps, are the hungriest of all. For them, the thap is where it all begins.

dreams on the danube

More than a decade ago, Lina Mounzer fell for elegant Budapest, with its monuments to 19th-century imperial glory and 20th-century political turmoil. In the city's complicated current moment, she returns to discover it anew

Photographs by Jérôme Galland

Szimpla Kert, which kickstarted the "ruin bar" trend in the city's Jewish quarter when it opened in 2002

Opposite page: The neo-Gothic House of Parliament, on the Pest side of the Danube

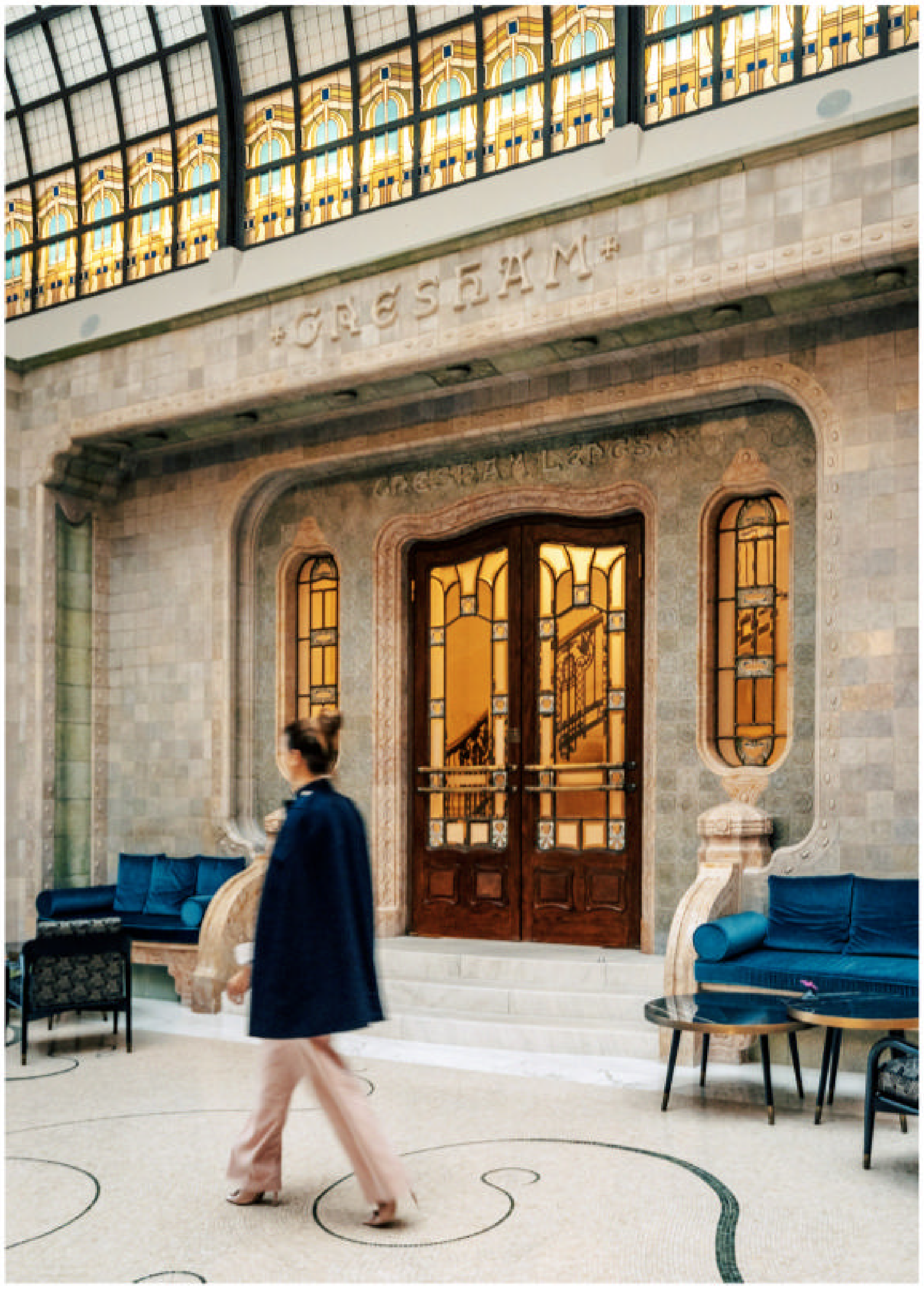
i fell in love

with Budapest on my first evening there. It was late August 2011, and I was starting a three-month literary residency with the József Attila Kör association. As I traveled in a taxi toward Veres Pálné Street, the light fell in a rich afternoon dazzle, and the trees bowed over the grand boulevards under the emerald weight of their foliage. Cyclists whizzed along paths, and people crammed onto bright yellow trams. Aside from the incongruous graffiti, the setting resembled a 19th-century period film.

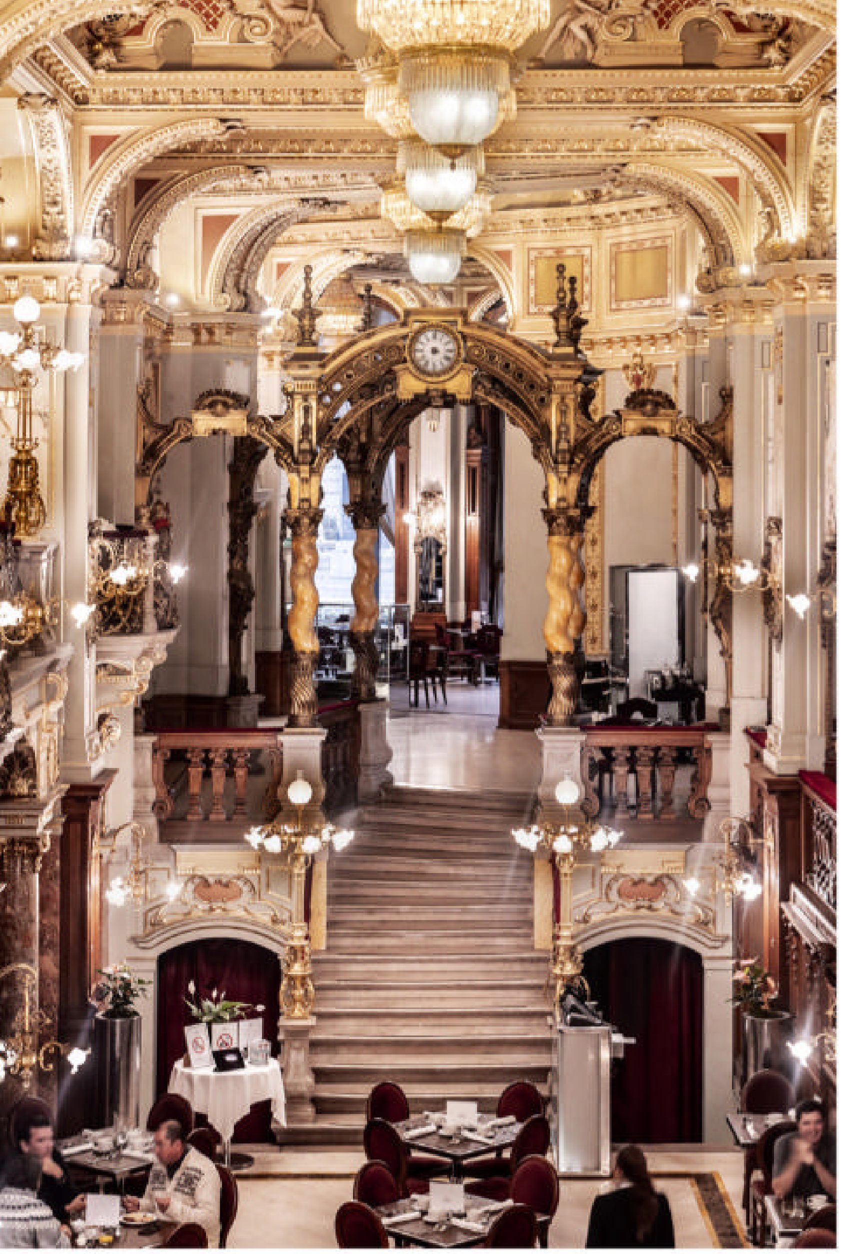
That night, I wandered through cobbled streets where sidewalk cafés buzzed with conversation, crowds danced around street musicians, and couples sought privacy in the shadows beneath lush trees. A building pockmarked with holes from World War II mortar fire was a reminder of the miracle of this city—that so many of its old-world treasures remain intact. The Danube was astonishingly broad, the light-flecked hills of Buda towering on the other side, the blazing dome of Buda Castle perched at the very top. I flowed with the crowd across the Széchenyi Chain Bridge, past its massive lion statues. Standing on the Buda side of the river, I took in the fantastical double view of the House of Parliament and its reflection. The building's neo-Gothic domes and spires were lit up against the indigo night, creating Impressionist dapples on the river. I hadn't expected the elegance and splendor of the grand Art Nouveau buildings, both imposing and delicate, casually arrayed along streets and boulevards in various states of decline, as if they weren't architectural marvels. I'm ashamed to say I'd imagined Budapest to be blockier, dulled by Soviet brutalist design. As someone born and raised in Beirut, I thought I was above making easy assumptions about a place. After all, my city, too, surprises visitors with its vibrancy.

The city rewarded me for my attentiveness: exquisitely carved moldings above entrances; wondrous courtyards hidden behind nondescript doors. The nightlife was raucous, with revelers dancing among the ruins of their painful past. The Seventh District, with its underground nightclubs and eclectic ruin bars that started cropping up about two decades ago in abandoned homes and dilapidated stores, was one of Europe's largest Jewish ghettos before the Holocaust. After that came the Soviet occupation, and though the Hungarians bravely resisted, the 1956 Hungarian Revolution was violently put down, and the country's outsize creative talents—from the writers László Krasznahorkai, Péter Nádas, and Magda Szabó to the filmmaker Béla Tarr—were exiled or labored discreetly through the era of Goulash Communism to compose masterworks of symbolism and metaphor.

When I first arrived, every Hungarian I met assured me that all Hungarians were dour and unfriendly—usually as they were insisting on paying for a drink or patiently explaining the finer points of Hungarian grammar or history. New friends described the same kinds of upheavals I'd experienced in Beirut. In the years following the revolution, life was narrow and difficult but full of the communal closeness and the small joys of hard times. And then, in the early 1990s, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, there came a giddy



Clockwise from top left: Aria Hotel Budapest, near St. Stephen's Basilica; built in 1897, the Great Market Hall sells everything from fruit to clothing; the Four Seasons Hotel Gresham Palace Budapest; the Sou Fujimoto–designed House of Hungarian Music cultural center, which opened last year in City Park; mod interiors at Ibolya Espresso bar



Clockwise from top left: The storied New York Café; Déryné Bistro, where breakfast is served on weekends until 4 p.m.; Széchenyi Thermal Bath, one of Europe's largest bath complexes; the city's tram system has been operating since 1866

sense of a wide-open future. Budapest was electric with life and tender with romance. But two decades later, the dream had soured, beset by economic uncertainty and fears of mass immigration. During my visit, I witnessed enormous demonstrations against the new Hungarian constitution put forth by the right-wing Fidesz party, which would subsequently allow Prime Minister Viktor Orbán to consolidate control of the state. After my own experience living through the Lebanese Civil War, I identified with the people's passion for the fight ahead.

Unforeseen events led to the writers association funding an extra month's stay for me. One night I biked to a poetry reading at a café in Buda. I didn't understand a word, but I loved the music of the language. I knew then that I would live here. That night I met the man who would become my partner. I ended up staying with him in Budapest for two years.

Nearly 12 years after that first trip, I returned one late September night. The trees were still full and green, but it was colder than I expected. On the drive into the city, neon signs flashed words in the night—words which, after a few seconds, I miraculously remembered and understood. *Élelmiszer áruház:* "supermarket." *Gyógyszertár:* "pharmacy." That beautiful language, with its lilting consonants and arpeggios of vowels. During the time I lived here, I got good enough to navigate the cafés and metros in halting Hungarian. In the decade since, I'd forgotten nearly everything.

On this visit I stayed at the Anantara New York Palace Budapest Hotel. With its plushly refurbished interiors and magnificent five-story atrium, it's a far cry from the hostel where I first bunked. I'd passed by this iconic building, visible from the Buda hills, countless times. I'd once had afternoon tea in its famed New York Café, which first opened in 1894, falling under the spell of its dizzyingly intricate Belle Époque moldings and terrazzo columns, of the pastries arriving on elegant tiered trays. It transported me back to a time when Budapest was a dazzling hub for artists from all over Europe.

Built as headquarters of the New York Life Insurance Company, the building was damaged in the Second World War before being renovated during the Soviet era. In 2006 it was reimagined as a luxury hotel. In 2020, the Anantara brand acquired it and set about redecorating the rooms in rich brown hues with antique gold leaf accents, while preserving the original details—pink and jade green marble, gilded balustrades—so lovingly that the iPad-wielding guests appear almost anachronistic. Nowhere is this truer than in the Deep Water Breakfast Room. Once, the city's aristocrats dined here while the less wealthy writers and artists drank in the space above, occasionally sending poems and sketches fluttering down to compete for sponsorship from the wealthy patrons below.

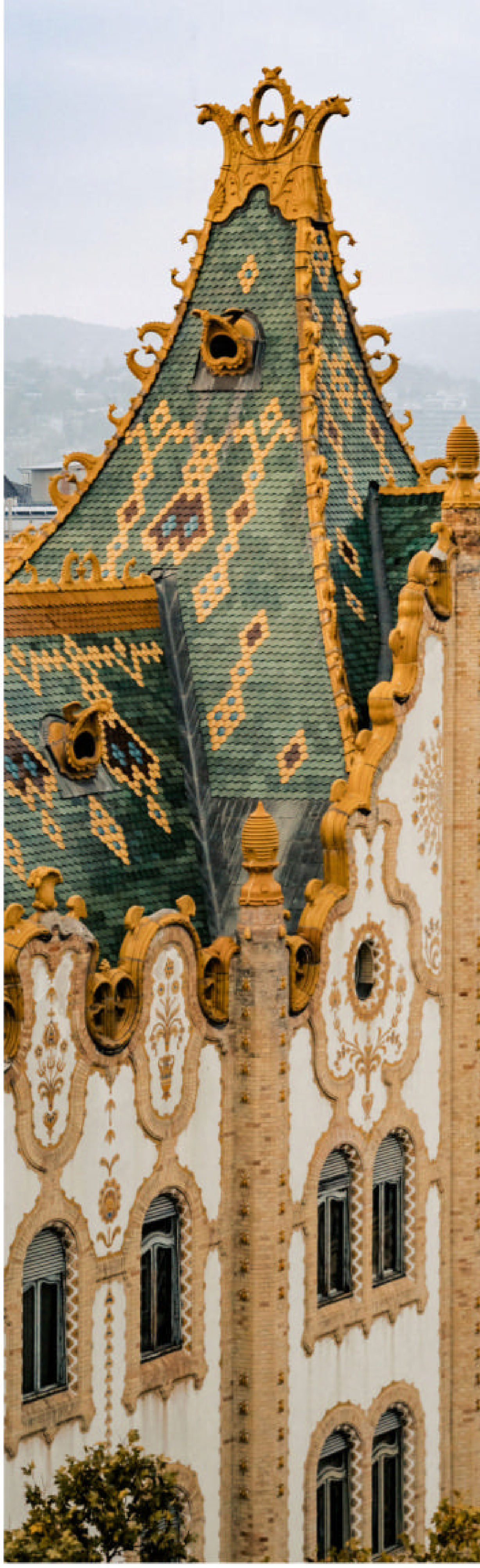
I woke up to a chilly, sunny dawn and rented a bicycle. Flat Pest

is a lazy cyclist's dream. While I coasted along the stately, tree-lined stretch of Andrássy Avenue toward Heroes' Square and City Park, it was easy to imagine Budapest's gentry during the Austro-Hungarian Empire riding along in carriages as they took in these same buildings. Even in hilly Buda, the paths have only the gentlest inclines, and there is a long, level stretch right along the Danube. If the weather had been nicer, I would have been tempted to ride all the way to the little village of Szentendre, 12 miles away, to try the catfish stew at one of the many little restaurants on the green riverbanks.

Instead I returned the bike and wandered the streets, visiting my own personal landmarks: the café overlooking St. Stephen's Basilica, where I celebrated finding an apartment; the bench in Szabadság Square, near the absurd little statue of Ronald Reagan where I used to enjoy reading. I found I remembered the vivid neighborhoods, but I'd forgotten how they connected. Somehow, though, the city worked its old magic, and I found myself the Gerlóczy café—exactly where I wanted to be for lunch. I chose two Hungarian classics from the menu: goose liver as a starter and stuffed peppers as a main. To drink, I ordered a glass of beautifully balanced Hungarian Tokaj wine. The food was just as good as I remembered; hearty but light enough to not leave me groaning with exhaustion.

Another day I biked down Andrássy, which was lined with equipment trucks and catering vans. A movie was shooting nearby. I wondered which stars were in town. When I lived on Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Street, I watched Bruce Willis repeatedly pass beneath my window one day. I crossed the Margaret Bridge and explored the lush, verdant paths of Margaret Island. After refueling at Déryné Bistro in Buda, I whizzed through Logodi Street in the Castle District, where stairs rose steeply from a secret, leaf-dappled path up to the centuries-old neighborhoods around the castle. Later the hotel arranged a tour led by the warm Imre Kopasz, a former schoolteacher who drove my group around the city's landmarks in his cherry-red convertible VW Samba van.

The city has changed while I was away, but less than I'd thought it might. Some places have been closed by the pandemic. Certain neighborhoods seem a little more derelict, while others have been gentrified. But Budapest feels as vital as ever, and, despite the best efforts of Hungary's prime minister, it has grown so much more diverse. Immigrants in countless new restaurants serve dishes I struggled to find a decade ago. For Asian street food, I used to take the tram to the big Chinese street market near the Józsefvárosi railway station, and when I was homesick there were only one or two Lebanese-Syrian restaurants to choose from. Now there are offerings from cuisines across the world. Budapest's essential cosmopolitan spirit—diverse and resilient, romantic and vibrant—stands in defiance to the narrow nationalism the Hungarian state has adopted. Irrepressible, the city I love has occupied the banks of the Danube for a thousand years. It is easy, in that timeless place, to imagine it standing for a thousand more.



» where to stay

Anantara New York Palace Budapest Hotel
After a costly two-year renovation, this ornate 1894 building has been reborn as Budapest's most opulent luxury hotel. Much of architect Alajos Hauszmann's original work remains intact, including the marble façade, the period flourishes, and, most important, the legendary New York Café—but the 185 guest rooms and suites have received a contemporary makeover, and there's now a world-class spa. *anantara.com*

Four Seasons Hotel Gresham Palace Budapest
Movie stars still stay at this classic in the stunning Art Nouveau Gresham Palace overlooking the Széchenyi Chain Bridge. For all its oversized grandeur, it feels contemporary rather than fusty, with poppy art offsetting the stained glass domes and peacock feathers in spots like the Kollázs brasserie and bar, which has views across the river to Castle Hill. *fourseasons.com*

Kozmo Hotel Suites & Spa
Locals celebrated the 2021 opening of the Kozmo Hotel, in a slightly unloved corner of Pest. It's a cool renovation of a striking concrete building that was once the largest telephone exchange in Central Europe. Architectural largesse meets crisp modernity in the minimal rooms, Zen-geometric spa, and the Oyster Bar, reached via a grand staircase. *kozmohotelbudapest.com*

Hotel Rum
At this 40-room boutique property in the southern part of the downtown area, owned by a family of restaurateurs, the food is the calling card. The indoor-outdoor rooftop wine bar Solid spotlights locavorism and natural bottles, while chef Szilárd Tóth serves rarefied dishes at the ground floor restaurant SALT. *hotelrumbudapest.com*

Aria Hotel Budapest
The hotel occupies a terrific building, a restored 19th-century bank, with one of the city's great rooftops, in an unbeatable location a stone's throw from St. Stephen's Basilica. Its Café Liszt serves hearty, upscale twists on Hungarian classics. These selling points can help you overlook its slightly kitschy "music-inspired" decor, which includes a giant ribbon of piano keys threaded through the lobby. *ariahotelbudapest.com*

Clockwise from top left: Window-shopping along Falk Miksa Street's antique row; the Hungarian State Treasury, in a 1901 Art Nouveau building that once housed the Royal Postal Savings Bank; the Duchess, a cocktail spot atop the Matild Palace hotel

Opposite page: Szaletly, a lunch-and-dinner spot that riffs on Hungarian classics

» where to eat

Stand25
Owned by chefs Szabina Szulló and Tamás Széll, Stand25 is the slightly more casual Buda sister restaurant to the Michelin-starred Stand in Pest. The couple has been instrumental in changing perceptions around Hungarian staples with their smart updates of goulash soup and túrógombóc cottage cheese dumplings with sour cherry. *stand25.hu*

Szaletly
This is a newer restaurant in a high-ceilinged space up near City Park (itself worth a visit for the Museum of Ethnography and the spaceship-like House of Hungarian Music, by Japanese architect Sou Fujimoto). Like the decor, the food is modern-trad, with head chef Dániel Bernát turning out great dishes like a fisherman's soup with carp and "matchstick noodles." *szaletly.hu*

Mazel Tov
The menu, with dishes like quinoa tabbouleh salad and crispy falafel pita sandwiches, is solid, but the space is the real standout: a cavernous but singularly elegant take on the popular Jewish-quarter ruin bars with green walls, double-height skylights, and semi-industrial decor. *mazeltov.hu*

Déryné Bistro
This upscale bistro a short stroll from Buda Castle is open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, but those in the know come for the brunch—especially on Sundays when a DJ spins as diners put away eggs Benedict and truffle fries. *deryne.com*

SZALETLY
SÉF AJÁNLAT
HÓNAP BORAI
A SHOPBÓL

» where to drink

Marlou Wine Bar & Store
Frenchman Jean-Julien Ricard opened one of Budapest's first natural wine bars a few years ago in a handsome space behind the opera house. Hungarian wine has been having a moment, and he showcases bottles from areas like the famed Tokaj region. *marlouwinebar.com*

The Duchess
Roof bars have become as popular as ruin bars, and few are better than the gem atop the Matild Palace, a Luxury Collection Hotel, Budapest, housed in a Belle Époque classic steps from the river. Reached via the first elevator ever installed in Hungary, it offers panoramic views, bites by Wolfgang Puck, and an extensive list of cocktails. *heduchessbudapest.com*

Boutiq'Bar
Zoltán Nagy, the co-owner of this dark, unassuming bar, has been the driving force in Budapest's craft-cocktail scene. He likes to focus on Hungarian spirits, making drinks with pálinka fruit brandy or the herbal digestif Unicum. *boutiqbar.com*

Szimpla Kert
Of all the ruin bars that became famous for filling abandoned Jewish-quarter buildings with worn furniture and disco balls, the 2002 original is still the best. It's not just a cavernous bar and club—it's also a community center of sorts, with farmers' markets and flea markets. The owners haven't jacked up the prices, and it still retains its original spirit. *szimpla.eu*

ICONIC ITINERARIES

native lands

Following New Zealand's long-awaited reopening, Erin Florio travels the less-explored regions of the country where she was raised to discover the Indigenous traditions and contemporary Kiwi innovations that make Aotearoa a place like no other

Photographs by Adam Gibson

The view of Wainui Beach in Gisborne, from The Blackhouse

Young Nick's Head isn't the most visually arresting landmark in the verdant region of Gisborne, but it has gone down in history for getting noticed. Edged by white cliff faces, the slim, shrub-covered headland was the first thing Captain Cook's crew saw when the *Endeavour* arrived at the east coast of New Zealand's North Island in 1769. From my vantage point atop Titirangi Hill, it grabs my attention too, pointing like a bony finger into the same South Pacific seas that carried not only Captain Cook but also thousands of seafaring Polynesians aboard wakas, or traditional canoes, before Cook's arrival. Noticing my gaze, Digby Fraser, owner of nearby villa The Blackhouse and a longtime resident of Gisborne, says, "That's where New Zealand enters Aotearoa's story."

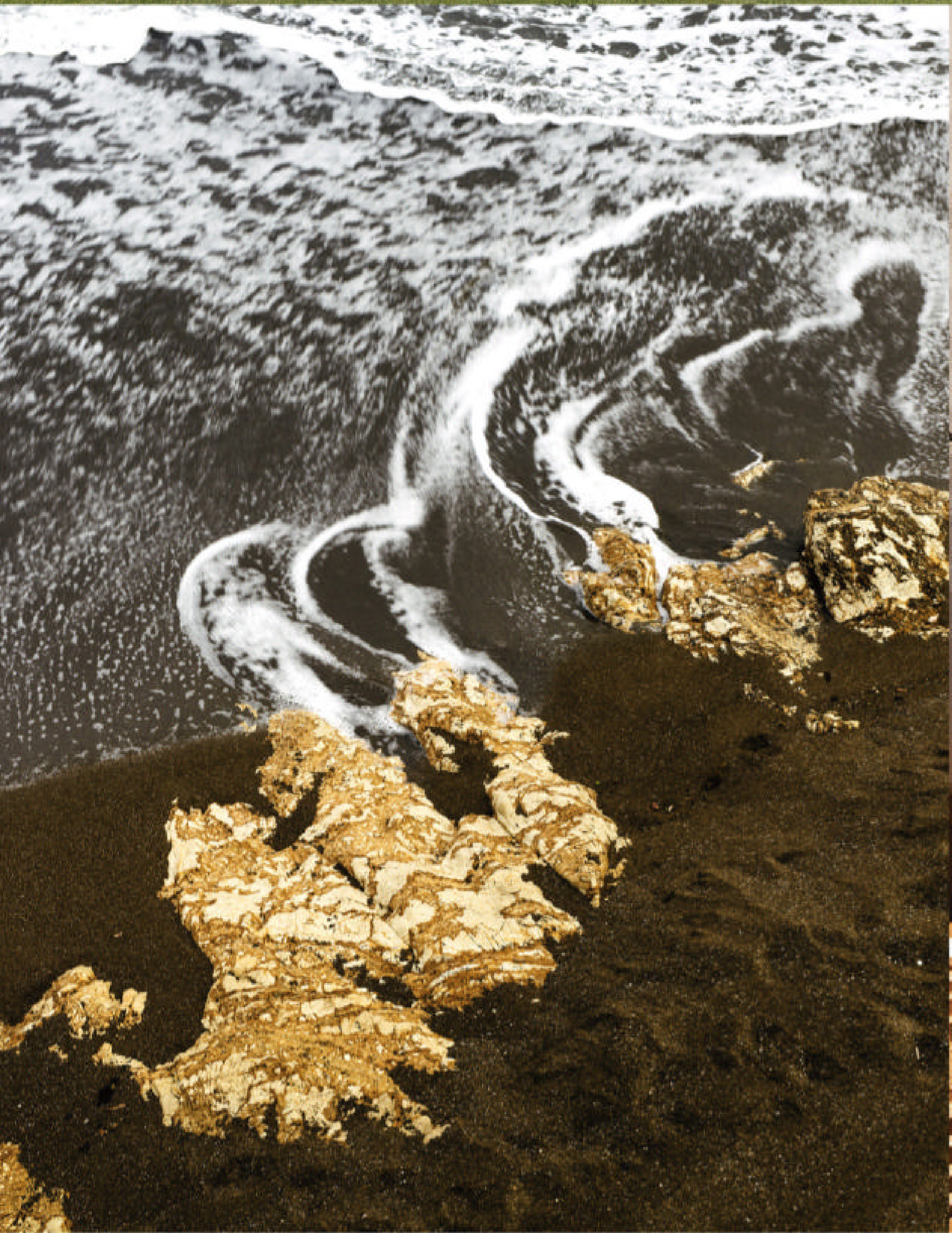
Digby is using the Māori name for the country to emphasize the idea that European contact is the most important inflection point in the history of these islands. This side of New Zealand hasn't traditionally been a big part of its draw for the legions of tourists who come for wine and adventure, but in recent years the country has invested in fresh ways to honor its past. Titirangi is part of the Tupapa Heritage Trail, a self-guided hike introduced in 2019 that leads participants past locations of great significance in Māori culture. When the country began talking about reopening its borders early last year, I got in touch with Sarah Farag, director and co-owner of Southern Crossings and a *Condé Nast Traveler* Top Travel Specialist for New Zealand. I grew up in Wellington, the capital, and on trips back I've often felt frustrated by the predictable travel narratives marketed to international visitors, which have created a certain lopsidedness in New Zealand's tourism economy, with certain areas buckling under the weight of all the arrivals and others never benefiting. My hope for this trip was to suss out lesser-known regions and experience some of the new ways Kiwis have begun presenting their homeland.

Besides being the place where Captain Cook came ashore, Gisborne's eponymous main town is the first city in the world to see each new day, which is why Sarah started my trip here. In partnership with The Blackhouse, Sarah can arrange a helicopter to whisk guests to the peak of Gisborne's Mount Hikurangi to take in the dawn with a guide from the local iwi, or Māori tribe, but I decide to view the sunrise from the stylish and very comfortable Blackhouse, overlooking Wainui Beach. A mug of coffee in hand, I tiptoe across the dewy grass in the gray predawn darkness to a picnic table. It does feel special watching the sun slowly illuminate the land, knowing that the rest of the world is still awaiting the new day.

Forty-five minutes up the coast, along roads that bend around sloping farmland patterned with tiny rippled pathways made by sheep, I meet my guide, Victor Walker, at Tolaga Bay. An enormously friendly man, Victor is a member of Te Aitanga-a-Hauiti, the largest iwi on the East Cape. He is a principal adviser at Te Puni Kōkiri, the Ministry for Māori Development, as well as an educator of Māori affairs and a coleader of the Indigenous-focused Tipuna Tours. In short, he has made a career of advocating for Māori interests. Alone by the bay, we walk under a carving of Hinematioro, a great chieftainess who became an ally to Captain Cook, up a pier that cuts deep into the water. Victor explains that the bay's lapping waves signify the anguish of Māori women. He points out the cave where Cook was ushered to safety from a storm by the locals.

Few precolonial structures remain in New Zealand today. Māori histories, myths, and beliefs are inscribed in the land, and a person like Victor, who is as much a cultural translator as he is a guide, is vital in bringing Māori thought and tradition to life for a visitor. On either side of us, cliffs plunge dramatically into the sea; above, a checkerboard of clouds creates patterns on the water's surface, shifting its tones from a dull gray back to the most brilliant green. I like to think that when the Māori chose the name Aotearoa, which means "land of the long white cloud," they were honoring the way the clouds can draw out the magic of this place, like curtains rolling back again and again to reveal the beauty of the land.

Clockwise from top: The Lake House at Lake Hāwea Station; a Māori wood carving of Hinematioro at Tolaga Bay; the Bay of Islands, a popular summertime destination and a significant site in New Zealand's history



Pa horse

Sarah is keen to get me down to Otago, in the South Island, and the next day I find myself at Lake Hāwea Station, an eco-resort and working cattle-and-sheep ranch that has been positioning itself as the future of farming in New Zealand. The landscape is different here, with yellow and pale green grasses carpeting the foothills and peaks that are still capped with snow even in the warmth of September. It feels wilder and more open than in the north, but the light and air are just as pure. Ngāi Tahu, the sole iwi of Otago, serve as guardians of much of its land. These crown assets were returned to the tribe in the late 1990s and early 2000s as part of New Zealand's Waitangi Tribunal, which sought reconciliation between Māori and non-Indigenous New Zealanders. Ngāi Tahu's land management, including its role in driving regional tourism, has been widely hailed as a success.

"This is a frontier country," Jussie Ross tells me. We are sipping wine on the outdoor couches at Lake Hāwea Station's Lake House, discussing the ranch's regenerative farming practices. Jussie and her husband, Geoff, like to describe themselves as climate activists masquerading as farmers. In a previous life they made a fortune as the founders of 42 Below, the internationally renowned vodka named for New Zealand's line of latitude. "We thought, How can we do farming as activism? How can we leave a legacy that's more than just vodka?" says Geoff, who has been active with the environmental lobbyist group Pure Advantage for more than a decade. (The Rosses sold 42 Below to Bacardi in 2006.) They acquired Lake Hāwea Station, then a failing cattle ranch, in 2017, and spent two years remaking its operations, gussying up turn-of-the-century shepherd cottages into chic cabins and adding a spectacular landscape villa. When Lake Hāwea Station opened to the public in 2019, it was the first farm in Australasia to sequester two and a half times as much carbon as it emitted. It aims to quadruple that ratio by 2030. Though New Zealand is a progressive country, conservative rural communities have a strong influence on public opinion. The Rosses have faced a backlash for daring to move agriculture away from traditional practices. "Farming can be a tool in healing the planet," says Geoff. "Some think it is a villain. We want to demonstrate that it can be the hero."

The view before us is so perfect it's almost distracting. The surrounding peaks are brightened by a late-evening sun and robin's-egg blue skies. The lake itself is still as glass, reflecting the mountains. In the paddocks, sheep and cows graze. Stella, the resident lamb, weaves among our feet. By the firepit, young shepherds and property guides who have knocked off for the day are chatting over beers. The scene is deliciously Kiwi: natural, pristine, laid-back but sophisticated. The property sprawls across 16,000 acres, with grassy pastures edging the lake and climbing toward the foothills. Lake Hāwea Station is too new to be part of New Zealand's legendary luxury lodge circuit, but for my taste, its refreshing lack of formality gives it an edge over some of the more established destinations. Mountain bikes are available, and the resort can make arrangements for guests to visit any of the area's attractions, like the

Above: Jack Mansfield, the farm manager at Lake Hāwea Station, with some of the help

Opposite page: The Boathouse at The Landing, a retreat on the Bay of Islands

Clockwise from left:
The view across Lake Hāwea; the lobby of the Hotel Britomart in Auckland; an in-room fireplace at The Blackhouse; The Landing's Gabriel Residence

Routeburn Track and the vineyards of Central Otago. But I spend much of my free time lazing by the swimming pond, one of the preferred hangouts for a pair of kunekune pigs and goats named Al Goat and Leonardo DiCaprigoat.

The next day, Geoff and I bounce in an ATV up the saddle ridge 5,000 feet above lake level, the highest point on the property. The Te Araroa trail, a 1,864-mile hike that runs the length of the country, crosses through the station. As we climb, Geoff notices a renegade merino sheep gingerly traversing the hillside and radios Lochy, the shepherd, to corral him back to the flock. Eventually we abandon the vehicle at a stubborn patch of snow and hike up the rest of the way. Natural springs shoot from the earth. I cup my hands to take in a good gulp of the stuff, which tastes divine. Geoff and Ritchie, a property guide who recently returned home to New Zealand after four years at the acclaimed Australian eco-resort Emirates One&Only Wolgan Valley, talk me through the principles of Te Taio. This is the Māori belief that there are four environmental pillars—water, weather, biodiversity, and land—that will sustain themselves harmoniously if left alone to do so. In the distance I can make out a dark green cluster of reforested kowhai and native cabbage trees, which represent progress toward a goal to replant one million indigenous trees here. Back at lake level, we visit a paddock where 35 varieties of natural flora are regenerating via their own scattered seeds. The only human intervention is a collection of custom-built rods poking up from the ground that measure carbon sequestration.

During my last few days, I return to the North Island to visit Northland, the peninsula above Auckland that is home to one of my favorite places, the Bay of Islands. This area is a fever dream of sandy beaches and droplets of land punctuating crisp blue waters. In the summer, the Pohutukawa trees bloom with brilliant red flowers and vacationers island-hop till sunset. The Landing, a private estate composed of high-design rental homes and working vineyards, sits on its own bay on the mainland, with knockout views of the surrounding islands. Two decades ago, owner Peter Cooper, whose family descends from several of the region's iwi, made billions as a real estate developer in Texas, and he sought to invest in his homeland by rescuing the site from environmental decrepitude. (More recently, he opened the celebrated Hotel Britomart in Auckland, which includes five suites named after bays at The Landing.) His team started by cleaning up polluted beaches and planting half a million trees, also partnering with the Department of Conservation to reintroduce the indigenous brown kiwi bird, whose population in the North Island had dipped by 90 percent just 30 years ago. "Anything that can be done to revive land has been done here," says Brett Michalick, The Landing's skipper, as we tour the grounds before a day of boating around the islands. Brett points out the location of the first European settlement in New Zealand, as well as the sites where pa, or villages, once stood.

We spend the afternoon darting among islands, unpacking ham sandwiches and fresh salads on the shore under the sun. I ask Brett to take me across the bay to the Waitangi Treaty Grounds, where the first accord between Māori and the British was signed. An excellent museum dedicated to Māori and colonial history opened in 2016. I learn more about New Zealand in an hour and a half there than I did in four years of high school history. Afterward, we dock at the bay in Russell, New Zealand's first capital, whose lovely waterfront still has buildings erected by 19th-century French settlers and a beloved pub with views of the bobbing boats.

By the time we return to The Landing, the sky is a swirl of sherbet. As I walk back to my villa, I am stopped by a rustle in the bushes. A puff of brown fuzz attached to a long beak and comically large feet appears on the path. It is a kiwi, a link to the land that existed here long before any humans discovered it. It scrambles around for a moment, ungainly and adorable, then finds its way back into the bush.

HOW THIS TRIP WAS MADE

During lockdown, Kiwis started to discover their homeland in new ways. Given my own connection to the country, I hoped to do the same on this trip in order to share less-known ventures with an international audience. The only partner I considered was Sarah Farag. Globally known as a top travel connector in New Zealand, Sarah has never repeated an itinerary in 36 years and can seamlessly pull off anything, from a day sampling exclusive Syrahs in Hawke's Bay, to an expedition to remote Anchor Island to track the elusive kākāpō. I set a few guidelines—every place had to be Kiwi-owned, and I wanted to forgo the helicopters that higher-spending visitors often use to get around. Immediately and enthusiastically, Sarah pieced together a fabulously original itinerary packed with destinations even I was unaware of. *From $29,700 for two; southern-crossings.com*

Newport's historic Chanler hotel

Opposite page: The view from the grounds at the Castle Hill Inn

mind your manors

Newport's historic estates, along with a wave of chic hotels and restaurants, are drawing a new generation of glitz-and-glamour seekers to one of America's original seaside resort towns

By Christopher Bollen Photographs by Marcus Lloyd

CLARKE COOKE HOUSE
The Candy Store
WINE BISTRO SPIRITS
BRAHMIN

On a hot afternoon in the waning days of Newport's high season, I found myself outside an enormous red sandstone estate called Rough Point, trying desperately to get a green 1969 MG Roadster into gear. The last resident of the late-19th-century mansion, commissioned by a scion of the Vanderbilt family in the English country manner, was the tobacco heiress Doris Duke. Late in her fascinating, scandal-ridden life, she founded the Newport Restoration Foundation, which is credited with saving many of the town's historic buildings. After her death, Rough Point became a museum decked out in her extravagant and whimsical furniture—an everlasting tribute to how the 1 percent of the 1 percent once lived.

The car had been arranged by The Vanderbilt, where I was staying, and I was late for an "experience" that had been planned for me—sampling absinthe at the hotel's clandestine bar. As I finally found first gear and haltingly exited the enormous circular driveway, two tourists walked past. "Did they film any scenes here?" one asked excitedly.

"Not that I saw," replied the other. "But I'm only on episode four! I did hear, though, that the owner ran over her decorator by the front gate."

The tourists were chattering about *The Gilded Age,* the hit HBO television series that has added yet another incentive for travelers to visit this storied enclave, in addition to the rich American history, the over-the-top ostentation, the epicurean delights, and the never-ending social scandal. Set just off the mainland, on Aquidneck Island, Newport is arguably America's most enduring playground for extreme wealth—a position, it must be acknowledged, that the city achieved partly through its role in the trade of enslaved people, an aspect of its history that it has only recently begun to acknowledge.

Newport's reputation as a summer paradise for the rich dates to the late 19th century, when America's empire builders and robber barons arrived in droves to build gaudy estates they

winkingly referred to as summer "cottages" along a shelf of picturesque Rhode Island shoreline. For the "Four Hundred" (the mythical list of those at the top of the pecking order, invented by social maven Ward McAllister), summering in Newport provided not so much an escape from the world as a sporting arena to show off their privileged place in it. They hired the most sought-after architects and gardeners, importing European tastes and traditions—and sometimes paintings lifted from Venetian palazzos—to create a colony of mega-mansions that strove to out-glint Versailles. The novelist Henry James derisively called them "white elephants."

"Newport, with its ocean and its palaces, was the Queen of the Watering Places," wrote the historian Cleveland Amory in *The Last Resorts,* his definitive 1952 account of American society's leisure capitals. But by then the city's star had begun to fade, and in midcentury more than a few of Newport's cottages, hugely expensive to maintain, were slated to be demolished to make space for parking lots. Thanks to the work of Duke and the Preservation Society of Newport County, most were saved, with some—like The Breakers, one of the city's most popular attractions—becoming house museums, often with audio guides that catalog both the perverse excesses and the real artistry involved in erecting and maintaining these extravagant jewel boxes.

As large as the past looms in Newport, in our current gilded age the town's pedigree has also made it very much a place of the present. Contemporary hotels and restaurants have been opening right and left, bringing balance to the historical cachet. Billionaires and celebrities, including Oracle cofounder Larry Ellison,

Clockwise from far left: Audrey Finocchiaro and Sam Lancaster, owners of the Nitro Bar; Newport's roots go back to the 1600s; the view from Ocean Drive; Kingscote, a Gothic Revival mansion; executive chef Glaister Knight at the Brenton hotel; the well-preserved interiors of Castle Hill Inn

LE BEC SUCRÉ
MIDDLETOWN
RHODE ISLAND

Clockwise from left: Prepping bivalves at Matunuck Oyster Bar; the modern interiors at Hammetts Hotel; Le Bec Sucré, a popular bakery in nearby Middletown

Opposite page: The Elms, one of Newport's famous mansions

Blackstone CEO Stephen Schwarzman, and comedian Jay Leno, have all recently purchased iconic estates on the waterfront. Demand for historic estates as wedding venues has spiked since Jennifer Lawrence married art dealer Cooke Maroney at the Belcourt of Newport mansion on Bellevue Avenue in 2019. And now *The Gilded Age,* which began airing in January 2022, has done for Newport what *Game of Thrones* did for Iceland. Several of the iconic mansions, including The Breakers, Marble House, Rosecliff, and The Elms, appear in the show, as do the grass courts of the International Tennis Hall of Fame. Again and again while touring the houses, I heard the same refrains: "What scene did they film here?" "Did the actors actually sit on these exact beds?"

"That's the power of screen tourism," Steven Feinberg proudly declared. As the executive director of the Rhode Island Film and Television Office, he had a major hand in welcoming the production of *The Gilded Age* to Newport. Feinberg, who grew up in the area, said he wanted to be involved in the local cinema industry ever since he learned as a kid about the 1974 adaptation of *The Great Gatsby,* which used two Newport cottages as stand-ins for the eponymous bootlegger's home in West Egg. In 2019, the week the *Downton Abbey* movie first premiered, Feinberg persuaded series creator Julian Fellowes and his team to visit, hosting an intimate dinner in one of the grandest of Newport rooms, the pink-marble-enshrined dining room of Marble House. "It was a magical opportunity," he said. A second season wrapped filming here last year.

Perhaps no hotel offers a more Gilded Age–worthy stay than The Vanderbilt, tucked into

the downtown historic district a short walk from the Newport Harbor. Financed by the playboy heir Alfred Gwynne Vanderbilt, the 1909 brick structure was rumored to have been a gift to his mistress. After she ran off to London and later died by suicide, it was used instead as the city's YMCA. It was recently acquired by Auberge Resorts Collection, which gave it an extensive makeover that has resulted in a stunning balance of moody decadence and clean, classic modernism, with many signature winks to the bygone era of clubby American splendor. My absinthe tasting, when I finally made it, was called "The Green Hour" and took place in a hidden parlor named after a dead Vanderbilt heir's wife. It involved a beaker-like fountain slowly dripping the cloudy alcohol over a sugar cube while gourmet treats were sent in from the chef.

A stroll through town reveals additional history beyond the Gilded Age relics: the country's oldest continuously operating tavern; its oldest surviving synagogue; its oldest lending library. There's the Francis Malbone House, a cozy, antiques-filled inn inside a 1760 home. Near the harbor, a cult diner called Franklin Spa still has its original 1940s counter and swivel stools and looks largely unchanged from the morning in 1953 when a young Massachusetts senator named John F. Kennedy married Jacqueline Bouvier at the Catholic church across the street.

Still, not everything in Newport is sepia-tinted. Perhaps no other locale in town

where to stay

Castle Hill Inn
Sitting on 40 acres, this Relais & Châteaux mansion has breezy white-on-white guest rooms with Atlantic-facing decks. At cocktail hour, its lawn is packed with glamorous locals and out-of-towners.
From $535; castlehillinn.com

The Brenton
This contemporary newcomer on the waterfront has 57 stylish rooms with nautical decor and harbor views, plus a happening rooftop bar.
From $299; brentonhotel.com

The Chanler
Located on Newport's famous Cliff Walk, this 19th-century mansion oozes historic charm, like the dark wood paneling and ruffled bedspreads in the ocean-facing rooms.
From $1,025; thechanler.com

The Francis Malbone House
This charming inn occupies a former 1760 private residence on the harbor. Its original owner built secret tunnels from the basement to the wharf to avoid paying the British taxes on imported goods.
From $275; malbone.com

The Vanderbilt, Auberge Resorts Collection
Auberge relaunched this grande dame in 2021 with bold touches like cobalt blue tiles, but made sure to preserve its rich history, including at a secret bar.
From $629; aubergeresorts.com

delivers such a happening scene as Castle Hill Inn. Standing atop a peninsula jutting out into Narragansett Bay, the Victorian mansion offers a panorama of sailboats gliding out of the harbor, with an outdoor bar doing a steady business of vodka sodas and white wine while doubling as Newport's premier selfie spot. On my visit, I briefly became an in-demand photographer, helping no fewer than four couples who wanted shots of themselves hugging in the light of the dipping sun.

Afterward, some headed to dinner at Giusto, a cutting-edge Italian spot on Commercial Wharf in the new Hammetts Hotel complex. "Excuse me, are you from around here?" asked a young woman as I squeezed into the only available seat at the marble-topped bar. It sounded like a pickup line, but she just wanted to rave about the lettuce-wrapped fresh crab appetizer dressed in mango and chili. Owner Kevin O'Donnell, who grew up in nearby North Kingstown, returned home in 2020 after years of working in kitchens in New York and Paris. "I wanted to make this restaurant different from what else was available in Newport," he said, "more than the basic clam chowder and fried calamari."

Nearby, a new museum devoted to the sport of sailing opened in 2022 along the souvenir strip of Thames Street. Naturally, sailing is huge in Newport, home to one of America's biggest annual regattas. But when I wasn't grinding the gears of my MG, I chose to tour the city in a 2001 Jaguar XJ8 in British racing green, thanks to Bruce Spitzer's unconventional new business, Newport Jaguar Tours. As we looped through the historic center, he recounted the religious groups of all faiths who had gravitated to tolerant, bohemian Newport as Puritanism

From left: Housed in a building once used as a YMCA, The Vanderbilt today has a rooftop where locals shop for oysters and champagne; Newport Harbor, a key Revolutionary War site

swept New England. (The titans of industry and future presidents came later.)

At the same time, much of Newport's early, pre–Gilded Age prosperity owed to its involvement in the "triangular trade"—ships sent first to West Africa for enslaved people, then to the West Indies for sugarcane and molasses, and finally back to Newport for exploitation. No amount of gold leaf can obscure that Newport was once the capital of enslaved people in New England. A monument memorializing those who died in the Middle Passage is in development for Liberty Square.

On my last day, I visited a windswept cemetery blocks from the suspension bridge that takes visitors back to the mainland. The Common Burial Ground is home to nearly 8,000 historic graves, the oldest dating to 1665. Among the figures buried here are a Rhode Island governor, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, an abolitionist, and several heirs to high-ranking families. But I'd come to pay my respects in a section known as God's Little Acre. It holds the largest and oldest surviving markers of enslaved and free Africans in America. Several of the granite stones have been rendered illegible by three centuries of New England winters, but others still bear names and dates and beautiful hand-carved engravings of winged cherubs and flying death's-heads. According to the map on my phone, this tiny, forlorn cemetery is less than a mile from the gilded palaces of Bellevue Avenue, which isn't very far at all. Ⓣ

where to eat

Cru Cafe
This cozy all-day bistro does high-end comfort food like smoked-salmon avocado toast.
About $30 for two; crucafenewport.com

Franklin Spa
Ever popular for breakfast and lunch, this greasy spoon has been a mainstay for decades. Don't skip the hearty waffles and omelets.
About $30 for two; no website

Giusto
In dishes like littleneck clams loaded with garlic and guanciale, owner Kevin O'Donnell spices up local ingredients with Italian flavors. In warmer months, the terrace is a favorite for its harbor views.
About $100 for two; giustonewport.com

Matunuck Oyster Bar
Located in neighboring South Kingstown, this waterfront spot also offers tours of its oyster farms. Visitors shouldn't miss the legendary lobsters, crabs, and bivalves.
About $100 for two; rhodyoysters.com

The Grill
Newport's premier dockside dining destination is the type of place to dress up for. Beyond the requisite seafood towers and lobsters, it offers an exceptional tomahawk steak and weekend brunch.
About $100 for two; forty1north.com

a traveler’s tale

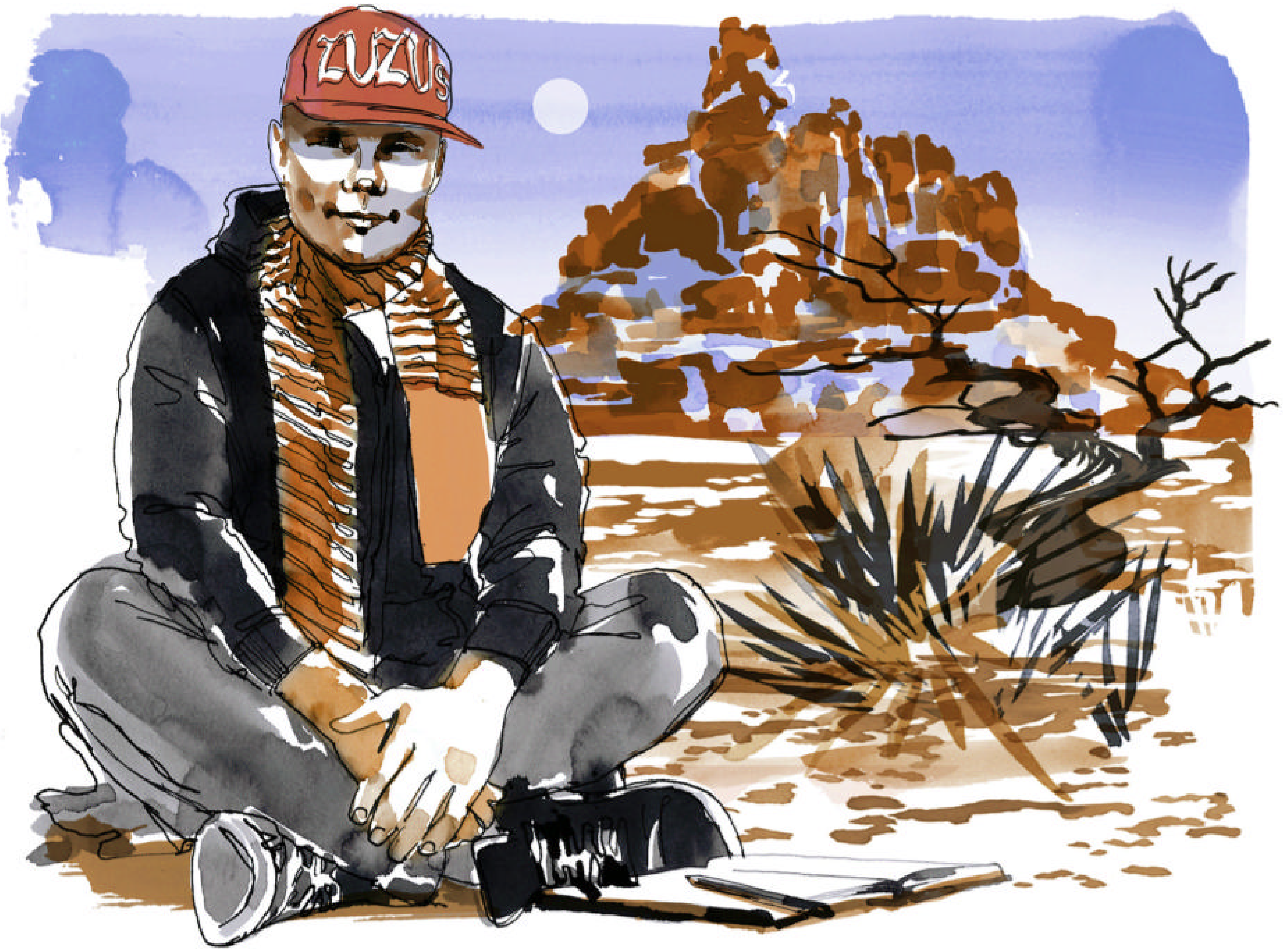


ILLUSTRATION BY SARA SINGH

Musician BILLY CORGAN on SEDONA, ARIZONA

“My relationship to Sedona goes back to the early 2000s. I was in a difficult period of my life, and I decided on a whim to go to the Southwest—it was the first time I’d ever taken a vacation on my own. For me, it’s one of those cities that feel outside of the American ethos. It has these spiritual roots and this almost unmatched beauty. When you’re there, you don’t have to go very far to come in contact with what makes the Southwest so appealing—that freedom of the blue sky and the timeless quality of the desert. Around 2011, in a different incarnation of the Smashing Pumpkins, I was writing the album that became *Oceania,* and I went to Sedona to write. The band and I were staying in a little boutique hotel in Oak Creek Canyon, and I got in this groove of getting up each morning and walking the trails and sitting on the rocks and writing lyrics. There are four or five noted areas with these special spots called vortexes, so I would hike around and occasionally go out of my way to find them. I’ve heard all sorts of theories about what causes the vortexes. Some say the city is built on crystals that give it spiritual power. But my understanding is that the vortexes are magnetic ley lines where the poles cross. Nature seems disrupted around them: The trees don’t grow straight out of the ground—they grow sideways. I would sit on them and sometimes I would feel enlightened, and other times I would just feel dizzy and nauseous. It was while I was doing this that I wrote the lyrics to the song ‘Pale Horse.’ It was about my mother, who was committed to an asylum when I was four years old. I’d never really written about it, even though it was one of the most pivotal moments of my life. It wasn’t long after this trip that everything changed for me—I met my partner, and now we have two children. But being in Sedona, and finding these spots and writing these lyrics, supported this really transformational experience. There are a few places in America for pilgrimage, if that’s the word for it, and Sedona is one of them. It’s got a magic to it.” AS TOLD TO BETSY BLUMENTHAL

BILLY CORGAN IS THE LEAD SINGER OF THE SMASHING PUMPKINS. PART THREE OF THE BAND’S LATEST ALBUM, *ATUM: A ROCK OPERA IN THREE ACTS,* WILL BE RELEASED ON MAY 5.

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